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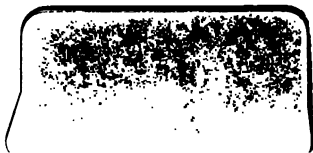
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MANNA IN THE HOUSE:

OR,

DAILY EXPOSITIONS OF THE GOSPEL

OF

St. John.

SPECIALLY ADAPTED FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES.

BY THE

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER, A.M.,

CURATE OF CHEAM, SURREY.

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INTRODUCTION.

It is a matter of much thankfulness to myself, and in my own heart, that I have been permitted to bring these commentaries on the Gospels to a close. I do not presume to suppose that I have added much to the stores of the Christian man's treasure-house: and I am quite prepared to admit of my own volumes, what I felt and ventured to express with regard to those who had preceded me, that no exposition, however faithful, earnest, or affectionate it might be, could meet all the changing wants and daily exigencies of a family circle. And when one adds to this, that the instruction needful for one household, is unnecessary for another; that the counsel applicable in one case, is inapplicable in another; and the comfort suggested to one, is hardly suited to speak peace to

another; that one wants building up, while another requires the taking down his strongholds, and that it would be impossible to speak a word in season to all and each in the brief compass of a morning or an evening exposition, it will be at once seen that the short-comings and deficiencies of every Family Commentary must be more or less felt in each.

Some desire an exposition that shall be adapted for the servants of the household only; and I quite recognize their claim to their full portion of spiritual food in all seasons of household gathering. But while I have no sympathy with those who would exclude them, I have as little agreement with those who would make them the exclusive objects of the exposition or address. I could wish no exclusiveness either in our public or our social worship, but I think we are apt to do harm by making the temptations and infirmities of a servant's calling the pointed object of our admonition. There are quite avenues enough to every heart in the affectionate earnestness and impressive tone of one who is deeply in earnest, and who is looking on all around him, not so much in their separate capacities as masters and servants, as high and low, or rich and poor, as in

their blended character, as suppliants at the same throne of grace, having the same wants, and needing the same supplies. Opportunities, no doubt, will arise, in which each class of the household may be especially addressed; and it would be wrong to forego them: and when such opportunities arise, evidently and avowedly from the subject, no soreness is felt, and the counsel generally as gratefully received, as it would then be judiciously given.


It is true the apostolic writings may be said to enter most minutely into the trials and temptations and sins incident to every calling, and in a marked manner to those of servants especially; but, to say nothing of the condition of the servant or *doulos* of those ages, those letters are addressed to collective churches, and not to the church in each household. We have not a single specimen on record of any address which Paul, or Peter, or James, or John, or Apollos, or Barnabas, gave to an assembled household: and yet, no doubt, they seldom lost an opportunity of speaking a word in such a season of profitable opening. John indeed, in his second and third Epistles, alludes to the hopes he has of shortly renewing his social inter-

course with his correspondents, when he shall "speak face to face, that their joy might be full;" and Paul too expresses a hope that he may be permitted to lodge for a season with Philemon, and once more meet the Church in his house. I have often thought what holy seasons of refreshment there must have been in that godly woman's house, who, in such affectionate earnestness that would not be gainsayed, constrained Paul and his companions to abide in her house at Philippi, and how that open heart of hers must have drunk in the soul-reviving conversation and exhortation of that man of God, for whom, like the Shunammite of old, she so carefully set apart, as it were, "a little chamber on the wall," with its simple inventory of furniture, "a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick." None however of these domestic or household addresses are preserved to us; but, however we may regret it, I think we may gather from it an intimation, that each householder is in some measure left, as our Lord expresses it, to draw from his own treasure, his own funds and resources, things new and old, things adapted for the various exigencies of the respective members of his household.

With regard indeed to this concluding volume, I can truly say, that this Gospel of St. John embraces such high and holy doctrines, that I have felt somewhat of a reverential dread in entering upon it, lest, like him of old, I were putting forth an unhallowed hand to touch so high a theme: yet I can truly say, that the more I have meditated on these doctrines, the more clear as well as the more endeared have they become. I have found them to be solid footing on which to walk in life; and I trust, through abounding grace, still to find them equally available "in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment." I do not suppose that all will read them, as I read them: I could indeed almost say with holy fervent Paul, "Would to God that all were altogether such as I am" in these views; or, at least, that there were more of love and less of bitterness in our differences, and more of unity and less of separation even when we disagree. At present, unhappily, the spirit is too much like that described by the psalmist, when he records his own disappointment, "I labour for peace, but when I speak unto them thereof, they make them ready for battle." The shibboleths of parties are the war

cries of conflict; and, alas! in the heat and dust of the engagement, truth is too often disfigured, and love invariably trodden under foot.

I confess at once that I do not understand, and would altogether repudiate, the terms by which parties are at present distinguished, such as high church and low church; still less do I comprehend the phrase which some adopt by professing to walk in what they call the *Via Media*, unless it be a middle path between right and wrong, a sort of sidewind patronage of either, permitting them, according to circumstances, to veer to the one or the other, without incurring the imputation of inconsistency, like those neutrals who hover on the confines of a battle-field, waiting to take part with whoever may win the day, that they may swoop down and share the spoil. There are indeed those, with whom no spirit of love should induce us to hold out the right hand of fellowship; where fundamental truths are at stake, there must be no compromise, no neutrality, no, not for an hour: and it seems to me that these are the great opponents with whom the Church will eventually, and perhaps ere long have to do battle. I do not fear the Papacy: Popery is worn out, and effete, in



spite of her present gigantic efforts—if I may so speak, it is all but used up, and will soon be cast aside for that last fearful phase of infidelity, for which she has been so long preparing the nations of the earth. One cannot indeed say of the Papacy, as at present developed, that she is smouldering out amid the dying embers of her once-scorching fires—far from it—but I look upon her present gigantic efforts, as but the last convulsive throes of dying energy: I look upon her as one might have looked on that furnace of the Babylonian monarch, which, because the king's command was urgent and he was exceeding wroth, was heated seven times hotter than usual, and in its overflowing flames destroyed the very instruments of his cruel tyranny, while one like unto the Son of God walked with His own in the midst of the burning fires unscathed and unscorched; and I would add, in the words of the book of God's Revelation, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and THE FAITH OF JESUS."

It has been kindly suggested by some who have had much experience in district visiting, that there are many passages scattered over the pages

of these volumes, and indeed many whole sections which would prove useful to the cottage visitor. I would simply mention, that to such its monthly form of publication in separate parts would perhaps render it more convenient and portable, the portion being previously selected: and I would add also, that the publisher of the work would be happy to reprint extracts and selections from the different volumes, if he thought such a manual would be an acceptable aid to those who take a delight in such labours of love for the Lord's sake.

I would only add to this, perhaps too lengthened preface, that I could have wished to continue this commentary through the remaining portion of the New Testament, if sufficient encouragement were afforded to the portion already published, to intimate that its continuance would be acceptable as an aid to family devotion.

The Cottage, Cheam.

March, 1854.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN.



SECTION I.

(Chapter i. verse 1—5.)

WE have now reached the last of the four evangelists, to whom was especially committed by the Holy Ghost the office of recording the life and doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why four were selected, and no more—why these four in particular were chosen, and not others—why they should not have been all of the holy band of apostles, but while two were of that number, the other two were later born into the church, we have no means of conjecturing, nor indeed is there any other answer needed to such questions, if they be asked, than “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost.” We have seen indeed, as we went through the preceding Gospels, how well adapted the writers were, both from their own personal knowledge, as well as intercourse with other

apostles, to the purpose for which they were chosen; and the same remark will apply, even in a greater degree, to the evangelist whose Gospel we are now commencing.

There never has been, nor indeed can there be, the slightest doubt that John the apostle was also John the evangelist; that he was assuredly one of the earliest-called followers of Jesus, and, in all probability, was a disciple of the Baptist, before he became a disciple of Christ. His own Gospel, as well as those of his brother evangelists, shews that throughout the ministry of Jesus on earth, he was admitted into the most intimate union, and closest fellowship with his Master, so as to be called "the disciple whom Jesus loved;" and contemporary history proves that, according to the prediction of his Master, he survived the destruction of Jerusalem; that he had seen, and himself shared in, the gradual and yet wonderful spread of the Gospel. Nor was it till the close of his protracted life, that he wrote this, the last, record of the life of Jesus. It has been usual to call this a supplemental Gospel: as if the evangelist's sole or chief purpose was to supply the omissions or defects of the preceding narratives. The expression however is as erroneous, as it is derogatory to the character of the other evangelists, and to that Holy Spirit, by whose guidance, and under whose inspiration they so immediately wrote: as if St. Matthew did not write all that was needed, and

all that it was intended that he should write; or as if St. Mark, or St. Luke had, through inadvertence, or ignorance, or haste of composition, omitted much which it was desirable to recover and supply by after vigilance and research. In one sense indeed the present Gospel may be called a supplemental Gospel, for it takes up that which was not the assigned province of its predecessors, and *supplies* what they were directed, not indeed to omit, but to render less prominent, and to leave their readers to deduce for themselves, rather than make it the subject of direct and express declaration. St. John, indeed, in no degree professes to supply their omissions, or to gather up the crumbs they had left uncollected; for he tells us twice over, that he has himself omitted a vast deal: and to guard against any misconstruction of his purpose, he has distinctly recorded why he was directed to write his Gospel, and that it was written that "we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life through His name." The preceding Gospels are the narratives rather of the life than of the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine indeed is there, but it is as an under current, of which, though we see it not, we can at once trace the course, by the greater verdure that springs up along its path. But in the present Gospel the doctrine is as the full and open river, the main object in the landscape, to which every eye is

attracted by its clear and limpid waters, sparkling with the sun-beams of eternal truth.

The divinity of Christ, and the efficacy of His atonement for the sins of the whole world, are the great points to which this evangelist directs his and our attention. The other evangelists were more directed to lay down rules of life; St. John, rules of faith; the one to inculcate the morality, the other the doctrine of the Gospel. And yet, as I have said, there is not a doctrine urged by St. John, which may not be found in the other: and if St. John more emphatically and distinctly asserts that "The word was with God, and was God," yet as we read the wondrous works of Jesus recorded in the other Gospels, we come at once to the same conclusion; the conviction is as strong in our minds as in that of Nicodemus, that "no man could do those things that Jesus did, unless God were with him"—nay, more, unless He were Himself God; for Jesus spoke, Jesus acted, Jesus healed by no delegate authority—from Himself the power emanated—self-inherent, self-existent. It was indeed the voice of God and not of man that said to the leper, "I will, be thou clean; and he was cleansed"—or to the young man on his bier at Nain, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise"—or to the dumb, "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him." Let us then thank God for this His inestimable gift of the Holy Gospel, that

by the mouths of these four evangelists, who both spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, every fact and every doctrine of Christ is established as by the mouth of unspeakable witnesses; and the more we search, the more we see and are convinced how clearly and abundantly they testify of Christ, that He is "*the* Christ, the Son of the living God." If we can truly say that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus," we may as truly declare that the spirit of the Gospel is the demonstration of Jesus in that great and wondrous mystery of "God manifest in the flesh." It is that mystery, the eternal God-head of the Man Jesus, which this Gospel of St. John proceeds chiefly to unfold.

SECTION II.

(Chapter i. verse 1—5.)

I HAVE read these verses again, because what I said yesterday was only a few preliminary remarks on the nature and purport of St John's Gospel in general, and not at all on this portion of its first chapter. There can be no doubt that at the period John wrote this Gospel, which was towards the close of his protracted life, (and he is supposed to have died after he had completed the hundredth year of his age,) many very sad and

serious heresies had crept into the church. They had indeed begun to do so at a far earlier period. St. Paul met with them among the Galatians, and elsewhere; St. Peter speaks of those "who denied the Lord that bought them," and St. Jude writes of "ungodly men, who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." St. John himself too in one of his Epistles, written several years before his Gospel, speaks of "many antichrists" as already in the world, and of "many false prophets gone out into the world," and in another, of "many deceivers having entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." It was but too probable that it would be so. He, who in the garden of Eden had sought to ruin God's new creation, and had so nearly effected his hellish purpose—he, who in the wilderness made another though impotent endeavour to crush God's purposes of mercy to fallen man, was not likely to leave the Gospel, that masterpiece of the Lord's healing and redeeming love, unassailed. And indeed Jesus Himself, in the parable of the tares, had predicted that it would be so, that an enemy would scatter bad seed, where He had sown only good. I need not detail to you at any length the heresies, which John here sets himself to combat; suffice it to say that they were the opinions of those who, in the words of the apostles already quoted, "denied the Lord

who bought them,' that is, they denied that Jesus was more than man, or that He had any existence before He was born into the world; or, on the other hand, denied that Jesus was man at all, and accounted for all His various acts, and miracles, and discourses, by some supernatural appearance, in form and fashion as a man; or "confessed not," would not acknowledge, "that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh" as any propitiation for sin, as any atonement for the guilt of a ruined world, but only as a pattern and example of an holy life.

You may perhaps ask, What have we to do with heresies like these? Are they not long since passed away, refuted by the distinct and unanswerable declarations of this evangelist? Far from it: "Neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead," was said of unbelievers of old; and at this day the veil is on the heart, not of Jews only, who read Moses and the prophets, but of those who assume the name of Christians, and read St. John's Gospel. I would however say to you, thank God for the inestimable gift of all His Holy Scriptures, but especially thank him for this Gospel of St. John. It is the key-stone of the arch of the Christian's faith—take away the Godhead from the Man, Jesus, and no atonement, no propitiation, no sufficient sacrifice, no offering meet for God, no ransom that could satisfy justice, no victim that could magnify holiness has yet been found: we have to

look for another—and yet there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must or can be saved, save only the name of Jesus. Take away the manhood from the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is not only no appropriate substitute for sin, no pouring out of God's wrath on the very nature that sinned, but we should have to say, He would not be that Saviour to whom I could draw nigh with boldness, and without fear—He is not, nor could be, that willing and living victim, who Himself came to me in the prison-house of my deep guilt, Himself assumed my prison-garb, and was found in fashion as a man; who Himself, as His angel afterwards said to Peter, said to my soul, "Arise up quickly," "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and I will give thee light," and the chains fell off from my hands. Peter, when delivered from his prison-house, might not wist whether it were true, and think it no reality: the damsel Rhoda's declaration that Peter actually stood and knocked at the door of the house, where his friends had met to pray for his deliverance, might be at the moment disbelieved as too good to be true. But we are not left without assurance, even that of the Holy Spirit, by whom this evangelist spake as he was moved by Him, that the Eternal Word, or Jesus, "was not only with God, but was God," and that that "Word was made flesh, and dwelt, for a season, among

us." If, with Nicodemus afterwards, you ask me how can these things be, I would say of this, and other mysteries of Scripture, that they are not so much for reason to explain as for faith to grasp; aye, and grasp with as firm a hold as Jacob did the angel, of whom he would not let go, till he had blessed him. Nothing can be more simple, more easy or intelligible than the words themselves of the evangelist; nothing more sublime, and beyond our reach, than the truth enunciated in them; and it would seem as if the Holy Spirit on purpose chose the plainest words, that no ambiguity might arise from them, and that we might not for a moment err, as to what the meaning of those words was. "In the beginning was the Word"—the Word is an appellation given to Jesus Christ, and was well understood by the Jews, and used by their sacred writers to express the second person in the blessed Trinity; and of this Word, or Jesus Christ, John expressly asserts that "in the beginning He was, and not only that He was, but He was with God, and was God." Let us not darken counsel by words without knowledge; but let the grateful response of our hearts be, "My Lord, and my God," I can trust my soul on that truth for time, and for eternity.

SECTION III.

(Chap. i. verse 6—14).

Matt. iii. 1—12. Mark i. 1—8. Luke iii. 1—18.

IF it be true, as I believe it was, that the evangelist John had been a disciple of the baptist John, before he became a follower of Jesus, there is something peculiarly touching and affecting in his thus stopping at so early a period of his Gospel, and himself now at the very close of his own life, to allude in terms of honour and regard to that first master by whom he had himself been brought to the knowledge of Jesus. And it is worth while to notice for a moment the terms in which the grateful evangelist speaks of the master under whose ministry he was first led to Jesus. I do not know a debt so vast, so incalculable, as is due to one, be he minister or otherwise, who is instrumental in leading a brother, a fellow-creature to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. The recollection, no doubt, is vivid, most vivid at the moment the debt is incurred, when the truth first dawns on the opening heart, and it leans more perhaps on the human than the heavenly instrument; yet I know not the day nor the hour when that feeling will cease to glow, and we have here a touching instance that it is alike unchilled by age, or by the near approach of death itself. And it may be that as the time draws nigh to be

with Christ, the busy grateful thought may recur more intently to him or to her, through whose teaching they first learned to seek and to find Jesus as their beloved. It is indeed nothing less than, as our Lord afterwards, and as our evangelist here describes it, a new birth; a being born again; and accordingly we find St. Paul calling Timothy who had been converted by him, "My own son in the faith;" and with what graceful delicacy does he remind Philemon, another of his converts, of the deep debt he owed him, "I do not say how thou owest unto me, even thine own self." Nor can we doubt that John felt towards that early master all the affection of a warm and grateful heart: and yet we may learn a useful lesson in noticing how soon he passes by the human instrument to record Him, who is the true light that cometh into the world and lighteneth every man. The Baptist indeed had borne true and unerring witness to that light, when he said to two of his disciples, Andrew and John himself, "Behold the Lamb of God," and had seen with unfeigned joy those two disciples receive his tidings and become followers of Jesus. It was not so with the majority; multitudes from every quarter flocked to the ministry of the Baptist, and, in full accordance with his errand and his mission, he announced that he was only the forerunner of one mightier than himself, and that his baptism was but the herald of a higher and holier baptism

with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And yet the majority regarded not; and when He, of whom he spake, came, He was neither recognized nor acknowledged. He came into that world, which He had Himself made, and that world knew Him not as different from ordinary men. He came more immediately unto His own especial people and the inheritance He had chosen, and His own received Him not, but rejected and cast Him out of His own vineyard. How true is the description of the election of God's free and sovereign grace, of that new birth and adoption into the family of God, by which those who receive Jesus, receive also power to become the sons of God. As one well says, "There are no still-born children in the family of grace; God is the living Father, and therefore all His children live by Him." It is indeed true of all that they are *made* of God, but the expression here used of these is that they are *born* of God, and partake of His holy nature. All human agencies and instrumentalities are studiously excluded from the operation of this new birth. God's children are born not of bloods, nor races; God's electing grace is not confined to one or more races of mankind. He did indeed elect Israel to be the depository of His everlasting promises, but the partition wall is now broken down, and God now willeth that all men, of every clime and every race, from the North and from the South, from the East and from the West, should come and sit

down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the rest of His redeemed ones. Nor are they, nor indeed can they be born "of the will of the flesh:" for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the flesh lusteth against the spirit—nor is it David only that has to make the mournful avowal that he was "shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him." We might indeed think that a godly father would beget a godly child, but we forget that there was a time when he himself was not born of God, and the original taint of his own descent still cleaveth to him and to those that are begotten of him—and, alas! it is not Hezekiah alone that has had to mourn over a profane Manasseh. But perhaps more painful than all is the conviction that our own will is unavailing to this birth—"Our very repentance," as Bishop Beveridge expresses it, "our very repentance needs to be repented of," our very tears to be blotted out with fresh tears; but perhaps the sad allusion here may be that the very will itself may be wanting, and though others may will, and pray, and strive, and wrestle at a throne of grace for those dear ones that are still aliens to God, yet in what bitter tears is this truth often written on our experience that this new birth, this conversion of the heart to God is not of the will of man to summon at his beck and bidding, when and how he will, and that in the language of the apostle, "it is

neither of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

SECTION IV.

(Chapter i. verse 15—18.)

THE evangelist here, again, returns to the grateful mention of his early teacher and instructor in righteousness; and records the testimony which the Baptist gave to Jesus, that He had existence from all eternity. As regarded indeed their earthly birth and ministry the Baptist preceded John in point of time, and yet he here says, "He was before me." Nay, we might adopt the Saviour's own words, and go still further back, "Before Abraham was, I am," and even far beyond—for before time might Jesus still say, "I am." Time indeed began, when on the fourth day of creation the eternal Word said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." Time began then—but "In the beginning was the Word," not *from* the beginning, as if the Word began then—but *in* the beginning, even when time began, the eternal Word was, and called that time into being. Well might the Baptist say, though himself the

elder-born as to human birth, "He was before me." Such was the testimony of him, whose especial mission was to be the herald of One that was about to come. And what is the testimony borne by the evangelist himself? it is the testimony of one who spake of what he had actually felt and known, when he declares, "of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." It was no doubtful testimony of another's report or another's assurance—he includes, indeed, those who had believed with him, the band of brother apostles; but he still speaks of what he had himself received, what he had himself felt, what too he was conscious he still possessed and retained, and well knew the source from which he had received all. And what was that source? It was from the "fulness of Christ," the ever-full, and ever-flowing fountain of all that is treasured up in Christ for all believers. It was not confined to John himself, nor the band of holy brothers who companied with him: they had indeed drank of that stream, and it had been unto them a well of water springing up into everlasting life; but John's last record of the love of Jesus, and the inexhaustible supply that there is in Him, is the gracious invitation with which he all but closes the canon of Scripture: "And the Spirit and the Bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

It is a striking expression "the fulness of Christ," especially when contrasted with the emptiness of man. It is only in the contrast of these two extremes, the sinner's deep and utter poverty, and "the unsearchable riches of Christ," that we can at all comprehend the extent of the gift thus given to believers. What is it that the sinner first needs? it is pardon—then "let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will *abundantly pardon.*" And if, as the apostle so feelingly argues, "if, through the offence of one, many be dead, *much more* the grace of God and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ *hath abounded* unto many." Are we ignorant, and in need of knowledge and wisdom?—then, "if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who *giveth* to all men *liberally.*" In Him dwell all the treasures of wisdom; and it was when contemplating that wisdom, that the apostle broke forth into that fervent exclamation, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Nay, what words can more strikingly express the fulness there is in Christ, than the apostle's declaration, that "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell," and that accordingly "in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and no ampler prayer could he pour forth from the fulness of his own heart on behalf of his beloved converts, than that they might "be filled with all the fulness of

God." But this is not a point to talk about, or to describe. We might hear or read of the wonderful discoveries of gold-fields, and gold-miners, and streams that flow with gold, and yet we should hardly comprehend the nature or the extent of the wealth that lies hidden there—but if we saw it with our eyes, or handled it with our hands, then we should have a notion of the extent of treasure in a Californian or Australian gold-field. Or, again, if we were to attempt to explain to one who had never seen honey, the nature of its sweetness, he would, after all, but little comprehend what that sweetness was; yet if he once tasted it, he would know what was meant, when it was said of any thing, it is "sweeter than honey or the honeycomb."

I have often thought what a sweet encouragement to prayer is this assurance that we are going to a full Christ, whether for our own wants or the wants of others. As regards indeed intercessory prayer, as we pray on for one after another, Christ's fulness seems to expand, like the circles in a stream, enlarging with every claim, till it takes in all. It would be very different, if we were pleading with man—we should feel something like the patriarch, even when pleading with God for Sodom, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once." If we were asking of an earthly benefactor, we should blush, as we brought forward name after name of those in whom we were deeply

interested, and for whom we sought relief and aid ; we should stop in very shame, and in the conviction that no amount of human benevolence could supply such varied and extended wants. But how different when we plead with God ! there we can unroll name after name from the inmost recesses of our heart, we can plead for those that are nigh, and those that are afar off, for those who are dear to us in the flesh, and those whom we shall never see in the flesh, and we still feel with every name that the fulness of Christ is never exhausted, and that the Lord is more ready to give out of that fulness, than we are to ask, not merely the blessings of time, but of eternity, the upper and the nether springs, grace for grace, grace upon grace, a goodly store, pressed down and running over—grace in unison with the grace that is in Himself, answering to the grace in Him, as the refiner sits and watches by his furnace till he sees his own image reflected in the molten ore.

SECTION V.

(Chapter i. verse 19—28.)

It is most touching to notice how in this first chapter the evangelist continually recurs to the ministry of his earliest master and instructor, John *the Baptist*, and with what affectionate and reve-

rential recollection he gathers up the records of those long-past days, and bears his willing testimony to the humility and faithfulness that adorned that master's teaching. John was at the time baptizing on the other side of Jordan at a place of passage or ferry, where many assembled to be baptized of him, when this deputation from Jerusalem demanded of him who he was, or in what name, and by what authority he claimed to baptize both Jews and Gentiles. It may well be questioned, whether this demand was made of the Baptist in any spirit of candour, or whether it was not far more probably in hostility and opposition; but still both their questions and the Baptist's answers are a striking testimony to the truth of Scripture, and the thorough belief in it which those questions evidenced. There was no doubt a very prevalent persuasion at the time, of the coming of some great one, and when the Baptist shewed himself on the banks of Jordan, preaching the kingdom of heaven and baptizing those disciples, who flocked to him in such numbers, it was not altogether an unnatural question to demand of him, whether he was the Christ, the Christ promised of God and predicted by prophet. As John repudiated this claim, they proceeded to ask if he were Elias, whom, through misunderstanding the prophecy, they expected to return again in person to the earth. John was indeed to come in the spirit and *power of Elias*, for so it was foretold of him, but

he was not Elias himself; and he then proceeds in answer to their further enquiries to state who he was. He was not indeed the Christ, nor *the* prophet Elias, nor *that* prophet foretold by Moses, whom the Lord should raise up unto them like unto him—and it is worthy of notice, that his further answer is given in the very words of Scripture, renouncing all distinction for himself, disclaiming every pretension save that of announcing the coming of One greater and mightier than he. And moreover adding that that greater One was already amongst them, though they knew him not, and ready to be revealed: before whose higher mission his own humbler one should retire, and that his baptism of water was effectual only as significant of that baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, which should afterwards be revealed.

It was a striking expression, “there standeth one among you whom ye know not.” One would have thought that it would have led to an earnest enquiry, as to whom and where that one was—but not a word is uttered in reply, not an enquiry passes a single lip—and though these messengers had been sent from Jerusalem with evident instructions to enquire into the claims of the Baptist, and pursue their enquiries with earnestness and pertinacity, yet the moment they are told of Him that should come, and was already come, that moment all interest is at an end, all enquiry *ceases, nothing of that response which afterwards*

broke so fervently and so instantaneously from the blind man when he first heard of the Son of God, "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Alas! is it not so frequently even with ourselves—do we not hear of One, who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being, who has not left us without a daily witness of Himself in that He doeth us good, and giveth us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness, and whose mercies are new every morning, and is the answer of our hearts, "what shall we render unto the Lord for all the benefits He hath done unto us?" Do we not hear of One, "who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" and have we replied with grateful eagerness, "who is He, Lord, that we may believe on Him?" Do we not hear and read of One, who Himself laid down His life for His sheep, who willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come unto God by Him, and who ever liveth and is now at the right hand of God to make intercession for us—and have our hearts burned within us at these gracious tidings, or have we turned away indifferent, and all but answered, There is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him? Alas! "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man;" *and the indifference and even the infidelity of a*

Jewish heart finds too often its counterpart in the coldness and unbelief even of a Christian heart.

SECTION VI.

(Chapter i. verse 29—34).

THERE is not a more valuable testimony to the office and work of Christ than that which the evangelist here records from the lips of his first instructor in the faith. I do not wonder at the tenacity with which the apostle's mind and memory recurs to those early scenes of his youth, and how he was himself led by the teaching of the Baptist to Him, in whom alone was remission of sin found. There can be little doubt that John was present, when the Baptist gave utterance to this striking attestation to the character and work of Him, of whom he had already spoken as amongst them, though they knew Him not. We know from other passages in the evangelists, how devoted was the attachment of the Baptist's disciples to his person and character—how jealous they were over his honour, and how deeply they resented what they considered the smallest encroachment on his own province, and the reverence due to his claims. John himself might not, and in all probability had not at that time those clear *views of the Baptist's mission and purpose*, which

he afterwards had, and which he so distinctly marks in the earlier parts of this chapter. Like many other of his countrymen, he might have looked upon him not only as a man sent from God, but as a man divinely commissioned to teach them the way of righteousness; and when they heard him preach repentance, and listened to his stern denunciations against the unrighteousness of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they might have been led to think that the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" which their master preached, was the way of access to an offended God; that to be sorry for the past, and to forsake the evil of their ways was the most effectual and acceptable atonement for transgression and sin. It must have been therefore with a singular blending of emotions that they now heard their master, not merely describe in mysterious terms the coming of one after him, who should baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire, not merely hint at one so immeasurably his superior, that the most menial office under Him were too high an honour, but saw him actually point to one before their very eyes, one in the very act of coming towards them, one in form and fashion no other than themselves, and declaring of Him, "This is He of whom I spake." And how different the language, how altered the figure, how changed the metaphor, in which he now speaks of this wondrous stranger; "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the*

sin of the world!" On the altar of Israel a lamb had been slain every morning and every evening day by day continually; but to the enlightened worshipper that lamb pointed to a holier and a costlier victim, which was hereafter to bleed for the remission of sin. To such an one, it could have needed no inspired apostle to tell them that the blood of bulls, and goats, and lambs could never take away sin, that the involuntary dying throes of an irrational animal could never offer atonement for guilt in the eyes of a holy and righteous God! When therefore John and his fellow-disciples heard their master say of Jesus, as He drew nigh to them, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," their minds must have recurred in some way to that most solemn truth, as yet so dimly revealed, so mysteriously shadowed forth, that that type which they had themselves so continually seen on the altars of Israel, had now met its antitype in that man, humble and unpretending as He seemed, to whom the Baptist pointed, not indeed as yet in its slain and bleeding form, but still as He that should redeem Israel. They knew not indeed as yet that His blood alone could cleanse from all sin; and there are many at this day, even though that blood has been shed on Calvary, that seem not to comprehend this one great truth, that "without shedding of blood is no remission of sins," and that "Christ," the true and spot-

less Lamb, "was once offered to bear the sins of many." We may indeed wash in every river and stream—we may go down with Naaman to Jordan, and dip, not seven times, but seventy times seven; but not even Jordan, nor Abana, nor Pharfur, nor all the waters of Damascus, nor of the world, could wash away one stain, far less the deep inveteracy of one human heart's sin. Oh then bless God for Him, whose blood cleanseth from *all*, which was effectual to blot out the sin and repair the ruin of Paradise! Look to Him to whom the Baptist pointed, not from any impulse or suggestion of his own, for even he knew not the Holy One of God, but by immediate revelation from God Himself, by the manifestation of the Spirit's actual descent and remaining upon Him, by testimony that could not err, he "saw and bare record that this is the Son of God."

SECTION VII.

Chapter i. verse 35—42.

I do not know a more interesting record of that most interesting and deeply absorbing moment in every man's life, the period of his conversion to Christ, of his quitting other ties, other claims, nay, other teachers also, and going unreservedly to Jesus, to take Him for the guide of his way, *and his Counsellor, even unto death.* These two

disciples had been present on the preceding day, when their master had so emphatically pointed to Jesus as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," as the one only atonement, the one sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. One can hardly doubt how that announcement must have influenced and impressed the minds of those that heard it, and led to secret prayer that they might be brought to the knowledge and reception of Jesus as the Messiah. It is not indeed recorded that it was so, but I think we may apply our Lord's rule here, "By their fruits ye shall know them," and gather from the immediate answer vouchsafed that it must have been so. For let us suppose that that night witnessed the prayer, that night the supplication went up and was recorded on high; and on the following morning, at an early hour, Jesus again draws nigh, the Baptist again acknowledges Him in the same emphatic words he had used before; and the two disciples follow Jesus, drawn by the cords of love, and the secret influence of a power they did not as yet understand—anxious, yet, perhaps, fearful—earnest, yet, it may be, timid—and evidencing by their eager step how much they desired to know Him, whom they were thus following. It was not here indeed as in the prophet, "I am found of them that sought me not," for they did seek Him, but it sweetly illustrates the truth of that

Saviour's after declaration, "Seek, and ye shall find." And, oh! in what a touching way does it reveal that Saviour's ready aid and preventing help; His standing as it were by the side, or meeting, at the moment of anxious enquiry, those that are out of the way, and groping to find it, and saying to them, "I am the way;" for even before they speak, before they give utterance to the earnest wish of their hearts, Jesus anticipates that wish, forestalls their purpose, and asks, "What seek ye?" He knew indeed what they sought, but He would have it from their own lips; as at this day He loves to hear His children and His brethren tell Him all their wants now, and pour out all their cares into His listening ear and sympathizing heart.

We may again take up the Lord's question, and ask, Did any ever seek the Lord in sincerity of faith, who found Him not? Did any ever send forth a longing heart-felt cry to Jesus, that was not at once answered to the very uttermost?" "Master, where dwellest Thou?" was the enquiry—"Come and see," the immediate answer. They followed Him to His home, entered there, and tarried till night constrained them to retire. We may well exclaim, O hours of holy intercourse, of heavenly communion, humbly sought, and savingly blessed! I dare say many a fond and fervent heart has uttered over the perusal of this passage, "Oh that I had been there, that I

had been privileged to enter that Saviour's earthly home, and hear that Saviour's voice!" The Saviour's home at Nazareth or Capernaum is now no more: the city once exalted to heaven by the abode of Him who came down from heaven, has long since been cast down to hell; but His promise survives, that "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there will He be in the midst of them." Oh! what a blessed truth for us to night! and yet it is a searching question that He is putting to you and to me, "What seek ye?" Can we, with the simple yet touching anxiety of these disciples of the Baptist, answer, "Lord, where dwellest Thou, that where Thou art, there I may be also?" "Lord to whom should we go; Thou hast the words of eternal life?"

There is one other remark I would just make on this passage. One of the two which heard John speak and followed Jesus, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother; the name of the other is not mentioned, it is of little consequence, though I think we shall not be far from the truth in supposing that it was the evangelist himself. But it is with Andrew we have now to do, who, at the close of that holy evening, proceeded straightway to find his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, "We have found the Messiah." Oh! blessed discovery! we have found, we have seen, we have talked with the Messiah. Come then, my brother, and my friend, come with us, and we will

do thee good. "And he brought him to Jesus." We do not know in what the joys of heaven consist, but we know that they who are the blessed instruments, through grace, of leading one soul to Jesus, shall share in that joy, which the angels of God feel over one sinner that repenteth; "and they which turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." Just then think, for one moment think of the holy joy which, in the triumphant home of their Master, now reigns in the souls of these redeemed brothers. "Thou, my brother, didst first lead me to Jesus, thou wert he who took me by the hand, and led me to the Saviour thou hadst found." And I would say to you, Go then, and do likewise—"Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee"—tell them of the Saviour you have found—tell them that you have found Him kind and compassionate to yourself—that He has forgiven your sins, and healed all your iniquities. Tell them that He is ready to save them too, that He still travails in spirit for them, and would fain gather them, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. You do not know how much good you may do in this way; many a wandering lamb from the domestic fold has been brought back and won over to better things and more enduring hopes, by that tone of tenderness and Christian argument, which speaks to the heart, because it comes from the heart.

SECTION VIII.

Chapter i. verse 43 to the end.)

THE call of Nathanael has some peculiar circumstances attending it, which may well afford us instruction. The conduct of Philip is another illustration of what I remarked last night, and there is something very touching in his anxiety—himself so newly called—to communicate to his friend and fellow-townsmen, the wonderful revelation of Jesus Christ. His own call to be a disciple had been in those simple yet wonder-working words of Jesus, “Follow Me,” and he appears to have obeyed the call with an instantaneous readiness that shewed how much of divine influence must have accompanied the words. And the sincerity of his own conversion is at once testified, by the anxiety he displays to find Nathanael, and communicate to him the glad tidings of the discovery he had made. It was the same feeling which, as we read yesterday, had influenced Andrew to find his own brother and lead him to Jesus. And I believe that such a feeling is more or less earnest in every converted one; and that the earliest desire, and I may well add the latest also, is to win over others to be partakers with themselves of the same unsearchable riches and treasure which themselves have found. It is

very different with earthly treasure; so much of selfishness is mingled, even in the most generous hearts; and with too many there is the fear that to communicate a valuable discovery to others would be to diminish its worth, or, at least, lessen it to themselves. I suspect that a vast deal of this cold calculating selfishness, with other and even baser passions, has been unfolded of late, amid the new-found treasures of Australia; and if a man has one day lighted on a vein or a strata which revealed treasures hitherto unsuspected, the first impulse of his eager heart would be little in unison with those of Andrew and Philip, to search out friend or relative, and invite them to come and share the spoil.

But be this as it may with others, it was not so with this new-called follower of Jesus, and though for a moment prejudice would have closed the door on Nathanael's access to Christ, there seems to have been a simplicity and straightforwardness of character in him, which led him at once to yield to the suggestion to come and judge for himself. I do not know that any argument can be deduced from the position in which we find the names of the apostles as recorded in the other evangelists, but it does seem to me, as if they were so linked in pairs to intimate a closer band of union between them, than that of brothers, or fellowship as apostles. Peter is generally linked with Andrew, James with his brother John, and Philip with

Bartholomew, who is supposed to be the Nathanael of this narration. It may be mere feeling, but I confess I love to trace this link in the truest brotherhood retained even in the mere record of their names. It is not always so on earth; earth's registers care little for such ties as these—but I doubt not that in the Lord's "books of remembrance" many such sweet links of union are approvingly recorded and treasured up against "that day."

Of Nathanael's previous life we know no more than the testimony given by Jesus—and yet what a testimony! and pronounced by what lips! An Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile! Many alas! of Israel were not Israel—many called Abraham their father, though God acknowledged them not, "We be Abraham's children," said the Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil," said Jesus. But here is one, whom He that readeth the heart pronounces an Israelite indeed. One has perhaps often wished that the veil had been lifted up from that scene beneath the fig-tree that we might have known in what Nathanael was then engaged, when the eye of Jesus was on him, though he knew it not. Yet can we doubt that it was in prayer, that he was pouring out his soul to God in earnest supplication—perhaps in the earnest desires of his heart saying, "How long, O Lord, how long," and seeking as it were to hasten by his importunity the coming of the promised and pre-

dicted One. The fig-tree, beneath which he was, was evidently a place of solitude ; not like that by the way-side on which our Lord came seeking fruit and finding none—it was perhaps Nathanael's usual place of prayer, where he knew no eye but that of God could rest upon him. And yet—"I saw thee under the fig-tree;" and if Jesus saw him, when none but God could see, the inference was irresistible, Jesus was that God, and the very prayer—what he had perhaps breathed only in the recesses of his heart—had been heard, and was even now answered by Him, whose eye had seen him beneath that tree, and who was at this moment speaking to him ; can we then wonder at the confession that sprang from his raptured heart, "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the king of Israel?" They were wondrous things which were promised to Nathanael, and literally were they fulfilled to him. He did see the heavens opened, as he with the rest of the disciples stood on Mount Olivet, and saw his beloved Master, the Saviour he adored, the God he acknowledged, re-ascend to His Father, he saw too the white-robed angels descend and chide their lingering gaze, and announce His once more coming in the clouds of heaven with angel and archangel. And that scene we too shall see, for every eye shall see Him then, even they that pierced Him. Remember, however, that the same Eye which saw Nathanael in his devotions, equally beholds the sinner in his acts of sin—however shrouded from

human eye, or hidden by the shades of darkness. It was a striking answer which a little child once gave to her father, when he was about to commit a theft and asked her, "Is any one looking?" "Yes, father, God is looking," was the reply, and the abashed parent quailed before his child's rebuke.

SECTION IX.

(Chapter ii. verse 1—12.)

CHRIST'S character, as displayed in this miracle, is one of infinite condescension and loving-kindness—condescending even to the innocent festivities of life, and supplying the means of entertainment. John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and they said "He hath a devil," the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they said "Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber." And yet how simply kind, how indicative of the gracious purpose for which Jesus came, and how illustrative of the rich cordial and refreshing mercies of Gospel love was this His first and earliest miracle! It has been well observed what a striking contrast this beginning of miracles under the Gospel affords to the beginning of miracles under the law. The first miracle of Moses was to turn water into blood, to render that pure and crystal element an object

hing and disgust ; to change that which was
n's comfort and refreshment into bitterness
horrence. The first miracle of Jesus was to
water into wine, the beggarly element into
viving, and generous, and soul-refreshing
l. I think too we may infer that Jesus
not merely to sanction innocent festivity, to
is that He disdained not to be a guest even
humblest board, but to put an especial
r on the occasion for which that entertain-
was given. At the first marriage upon record,
Himself, if we may so say, condescended to
sent, and to be as it were the High Priest to
fy the union He had Himself ordained. It
e, who not only created woman, but when
d created her, brought her to Adam, that
ight be an help-meet for him. And now the
Being, who in paradise blessed the first mar-
condescended to inaugurate as it were His
y ministry in this humble town of Galilee,
r His presence only, but by the first miracle
He wrought on earth. It is generally sup-
that the house at which this marriage-feast
ld, was that of Cleopas or Alphœus, whose
as sister to Mary the mother of our Lord :
this were so, it gives us a pleasing family
e and shews how the Saviour, when on earth,
ved and honoured family union, and the ties
e between kindred. And I think it is not
it peculiar meaning that this His first miracle

was wrought among those, who, humanly speaking, were chiefly His own kindred according to the flesh: and when in after days He was asked why His disciples fasted not, while those of the Pharisees and of the Baptist did so, it may be that His answer was founded on the very scene He now “adorned and beautified with His presence, and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee,” “Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?” And our own church, in her beautiful service, adopting the language of the apostle, represents marriage as such an excellent mystery that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and His church, and tells us how “He also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

I would make one remark on the answer addressed by Jesus to His mother. Our translation is singularly unfortunate, as it gives an impression that our Lord's reply had a tincture both of rudeness and irreverence, which it certainly had not. The very term by which he addressed her was the same He used upon the cross, when commending her to the care of John; and is well known, in its original, to be a term of reverence and respect. I

do not however doubt that there was a rebuke in the language He used—gentle, but perfectly intelligible, as when in His early boyhood He said to her, “How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” intimating no doubt to her and to after ages, that He would not admit of the least interference with His spiritual prerogative, even in the simplest grant to her request—that it was His and His alone to grant or to withhold; that the gift itself, and the time, and the measure were alike His; and that in no respect or degree would He give this His glory to another, though that other were His own mother according to the flesh.


I think however we may gather one more most consolatory truth from the remark made by the governor of the feast, when he tasted “the water that was made wine,” viz., that all they had tasted and drank previously was not to be compared with that now provided. And will it not be so with those who shall sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb? The Lord may have given them here of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine; He may have refreshed their soul, when it was weary, and revived their fainting spirit with the cordial of His heavenly grace; they may not only have tasted that the Lord is gracious, but have had even foretastes of higher grace and richer cordial; and as they have heard of that glorious land afar off, and the King

in His beauty, they may have seemed to themselves to have had some glimpses of its exceeding loveliness ; but it is not here, it cannot be, while cumbered with the flesh, that we can know what the viands of heaven are, what God hath prepared for them that love Him. But as the Lord Himself shall say to each arriving guest, " Friend, come up higher," how will, from every heart, gush forth that joyous acknowledgment, " I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee." The good wine is reserved until then.

SECTION X.

(Chapter ii. verse 13 to the end).

THERE must have been a miraculous power exerted in the act here recorded of Jesus purifying the temple from its various profanations. Were it not so, one could hardly understand why, at this early period of His ministry, and before He had manifested, in Judea at least, by His mighty works, the divine power that resided in Him, the priests and ministers of the temple should have so calmly submitted not only to such an exercise of authority, but to such a rebuke as it conveyed, by one at that time unrecognized by any act or claim, and, apparently, only of the humbler class. One wonders how those engaged in this unholy traffic,



numerous as they must have been, should have yielded to the zeal of a single unaided arm, for it does not appear that His disciples were directed to take any part in the transaction—how the owners of the oxen and the sheep allowed their cattle to be driven out; and, more than that, how the money-changers, that covetous and usurious class, suffered without remonstrance, their tables to be overthrown, and their unhallowed gains to be trampled in the dust. And yet, as has been well observed by the commentator, Matthew Henry,* how much of mercy, and tenderness, and forethought was mingled even with that burning zeal for His Father's glory, which, in the prophet's language, was even then eating Him up. He drove out indeed the sheep and the oxen, for they could be collected again; He overturned the tables of the money-changers, and threw their money on the ground, for that could be gathered up again; but the pigeons and the doves that would have flown away, and could not have been recovered, He merely desired the owners to take away.

The lesson, however, which the narrative holds out to us is the jealous vigilance with which Jesus watches over the profanation of His Father's house; and with what severity of indignation He, as it were, resents the insult offered to that Father's name. You may say that this was an

* Henry *On Meekness*

extreme case, and perhaps to our ideas it seems so, but in reality it had much to offer in extenuation, if not in defence, for it was all done on the plea of honouring God's name, and promoting His worship. The sheep and the oxen were needed for sacrifice—the money-changers were equally needed for the exchange of the foreign coin brought by strangers, and for the payment of the half shekel by every Jew for the service of the temple—and the doves and pigeons were permitted as offerings by the poorer classes of worshippers, who could not afford the larger and more costly sacrifice; and his own mother, you may remember, at her purification, had presented such as her own offering to the Lord: "A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons."

We should not of course see such a scene in our own places of worship in these days: with regard to many, now-a-days, it would far more probably be our Lord's parable over again of the man buying five yoke of oxen, and staying at home to prove them. But though traffic assuredly does not go on within the precincts of God's house, I fear many a money-changer's heart is found beneath the roof; and many a thought recurs to the mart, the market, or the exchange; and many a calculation made, and many a bargain sketched, even while all is apparently decorum, if not devotion. Alas! it is sad that with so many the house of prayer is still "the house of merchandize." Nor


is it business only that finds access there—the pleasure-hunter, the idle tattler, the censorious critic, the ungenerous scandal-monger, alike find occupation in, and desecrate the house of God. Even with all our best endeavours, with our earnest prayers against the sin, worldly thoughts and cares will intrude; the heart, almost unconsciously, will linger amid the perplexities and anxieties of the week-day's occupation. And one can well believe, where no effort is made to expel the intruder, how the whole man becomes insensibly absorbed, and the temple of the heart as much profaned, and as unclean in the sight of God, as His temple at Jerusalem was found by Jesus amid the lowing of oxen, the bleating of sheep, and the noisy clamour of the traffickers. Depend upon it, the Lord enters every place of worship, and looks into, and reads, every heart; and I would therefore impress upon you most solemnly, that you be careful and prayerful that Jesus detect not in your heart anything that is worldly or profane, unclean or unholy, anything that is trifling or unseemly. Those are solemn words which our church puts into our mouths when she instructs us to address God, as Him “to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid;” and Solomon's advice therefore comes with peculiar and appropriate solemnity, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to

hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil.”

SECTION XI.

(Chapter iii. verse 1, 2).

THIS portion of the Gospel, which details the meeting between our blessed Lord and Nicodemus, is one of the most important, I might say *the* most important, which we find amid its many treasures, for it furnishes the key which can alone open the doors of the kingdom of heaven to fallen and ruined man. Our Lord introduces the subject with the solemn and authoritative declaration, that unless a man possess this key, he cannot enter, nay, he cannot see, he cannot come even within eyesight of the kingdom of God. He may possess all that is amiable and attractive, and available in the sight of man—he may have ready access to the courts of princes—the doors of the proudest noble, or the highest monarch may open at his bidding; but without the one qualification here specified by our Lord, there is not, and there cannot be any admission into the mansions of heaven. In the language of the apostle, he may speak with the tongue of an angel; he may have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mystery,



and all knowledge; he may have faith such as could remove mountains, and may give all his goods to feed the poor, and even be a martyr for the faith he professes; his whole life may be one undeviating exhibition of knowledge, of benevolence, nay, of faith itself, yet all were nothing, all would avail nothing, without the one indispensable qualification here spoken of. He would not be advanced one step on the road to heaven, the everlasting doors of those heavenly mansions would be as effectually barred against him, as against the unbelieving and impenitent. Am I not right then in saying that this chapter, which furnishes the clue to this access, which puts, as it were, into every man's hand, who shall hold it forth, the key which shall unbolt and unbar those otherwise closed doors of heaven, must be, and is the most important that can meet our eye or demand our attention? Before however we touch on the momentous doctrine to which our Lord here directs our attention, I would say a few words on the character of him to whom Jesus revealed this most sacred truth.

I think we cannot be wrong in believing that Nicodemus was seriously impressed, and that in seeking this intercourse with Jesus, he was influenced by no unworthy motive, no low or mean opinion of the Teacher whose instruction he sought. There was undoubtedly infirmity; and he that is without sin among us, let him first cast


the stone at this poor timid one. I do not however find one word of reproach, not even an allusion to his cowardice or his fear of man in thus coming to the Saviour by night; and when Jesus in his tenderness has abstained from rebuke, we at least may well keep silence, while we learn a humbling but salutary lesson for ourselves from this our brother's weakness. Had we no other notice of Nicodemus than we have in this chapter, we might perhaps even from it have gathered that he who came to the Lord so early in His ministry, and who received such gracious instruction, must have brought forth fruit unto eternal life. There is nothing in this narrative alone, which forbids the hope that a work of grace was begun in his heart, and that therefore He who had begun it would carry it on unto the end. But, unlike the rich young ruler who came to Jesus on the same errand, but who went away sorrowful because he had great possessions, and was unwilling to count all but loss so that he might win Christ, we do hear of Nicodemus again, and when we meet him once more, we shall find the seed here sown grown and growing still; and like the man who "sowed in tears, but reaped in joy," so he, who timidly stole by night to Jesus, while He was yet alive, and evidencing by His miracles that He was a teacher come from God, yet when that same Jesus had died a death of shame, and was forsaken and deserted by all, this very Nicodemus is

the associate of one as timid as himself, who boldly went in and craved the body of Jesus, that they might pay it every honour. What an illustration of that wondrous truth, that "it is not the will of our Father in heaven, that one of His little ones should perish." Nicodemus was indeed a little one, not yet born when he came to Jesus, and but a babe in grace when he left Him; and yet, "I give unto thee eternal life" had been recorded in Jehovah's everlasting decrees, and "none could pluck him out of his Saviour's hands." And so it is now. He who protects the feeble infancy of the feeblest child, and gives life, the husbandman knows not how, to the tiniest seed cast into the ground, will equally watch over and defend the smallest germ of spiritual life that His Spirit has planted. And what a touching comment does this narrative afford of that declaration of the brother of this evangelist, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and *upbraideth not*." It is however no needless caution which bids us seek to be delivered from that fear of man, which bringeth a snare; and well might Nicodemus in after days rejoice in that love, which would not quench the smoking flax. Nor is it, I think, without a peculiar and most impressive meaning, that this very evangelist enumerates in the book of the Revelations, among those who are finally shut out from heaven, "the fearful" with the unbeliever.

SECTION XII.

(Chapter iii. verse 3—13.)

I spoke yesterday of the key which alone could open for the sinner, the doors of the kingdom of heaven. A question however may very naturally arise in your minds, Why are they thus barred and bolted? Why is access to those mansions, eternal in the heavens, rendered so difficult? Why are not their doors thrown wide and open to every comer? These questions, however, I would say, are not altogether correct, or at least they must be taken with some degree of reservation, and explanation. The doors of heaven are barred and bolted, but only against the impenitent and unbelieving—access to those mansions, eternal in the heavens, is difficult, but only to those who would enter in by some other way—the doors of heaven are thrown wide and open to every one—there is no restriction to clime, or country, or complexion, to class or party, to sex or age—the invitation is alike broad and comprehensive, “Ho, every one that thirsteth”—“who-soever will”—“come unto me *all* ye that labour.” And yet, with all this, it is perfectly true, that there is but one way of access into heaven; and that whoever is rash and foolhardy enough to seek admission by any other, will assuredly be disap-



pointed. The reason is plain and simple—God is a God of perfect purity—into heaven nothing unclean can enter, and man is altogether filthy. Born in sin, and a child of wrath, he is continually adding sin to sin, and heaping up, every day and hour, fresh materials to that barrier of uncleanness, which must keep him out. As a descendant from Adam, he inherits a depraved and corrupted nature; his affections are alienated, his desires estranged, his very principles perverted: nor can there be a stronger or more striking description of the carnal mind, than that it is “enmity against God.” Such is the condition of every living being as deriving his inheritance and his birthright from his guilty progenitor; it is not one here and there, while the majority are untainted—it is not the majority of guilty ones far outnumbering the few holy, and pure, and perfect—it is not unfavourable circumstances producing these results at one period, or in one country, which may not be found in another; but it is true universally, and entirely, at all times, and in all places. “There is no difference, all have sinned;” “there is none that doeth good, no not one.” Man is born in sin, and can such a being, continuing as he is, find admission into those pure and holy realms, where the God of purity dwelleth in light unapproachable? Even our very reason tells us, that “without holiness no man can see the Lord.” But what a change must that be, from unholiness

to holiness, from enmity to love, from alienation and estrangement, to reconciliation and peace, from aversion to longing after the things of God! What a breaking down of original principles, and the substitution of new ones, of old instincts, of inveterate habits, of corrupt tastes, and perverted appetites! What a transformation from the darkened skin of the Ethiopian! What a blotting out of the spots from the leopard's hide! It is a change as entire, as universal, as complete, as if a new birth were to take place, and transform the deformed and corrupt lineaments of the old Adam into the perfect beauty, holiness, and purity of a child of God. And this is the very image under which our Lord here represents it, "Ye must be born again;" that renovation, that remodelling, that regeneration of the whole man in spirit and in soul must take place, which shall change the very nature, and the very instincts of the whole man. It is true, there is no bodily change, there is no outward transformation—the man remains the same in form, and shape, and feature: the passer-by that gazes on the lineaments of him that is born again, may indeed detect no alteration; it is as the summer wind that blows over a field, or the arrow that is sped through the air—it leaves no trace behind that is visible to the eye. And yet that wind has refreshed and cooled the parched and heated grass, and that arrow, though apparently drawn at a venture, may have winged its

flight on the Lord's errand, and been sent home to the destruction of the old and unrenewed man. I cannot say however that I wonder so much at the inability of Nicodemus to comprehend our Lord's meaning, though, as a ruler of Israel, and supposed to be well instructed in the Scriptures, he ought not to have been altogether ignorant of our Lord's meaning, yet he had evidently taken the words of Jesus in their literal sense, and, as such, they must have perplexed him greatly. Let us for a moment suppose a man beginning to be awakened to a knowledge of his diseased and dying condition as a sinner, and to go to some holy man of God for counsel and remedy. Let us suppose him to describe his symptoms, (and they are accurately laid down by the apostle in his own case,) he would say, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; from the sole of my foot, even unto my head, there is no soundness in me; I am altogether corrupt; I wish to do what is good and acceptable to God, but I cannot find how; I know not the way to perform that which is good. The good that I wish to do is never done, the evil I wish not to do is continually done; in fact, when I would do good, evil steppeth down before it, and carries off and destroys my good intention. I find indeed a law, some constraining overruling power, tyrannizing over and warring against the law of *my mind*, and bringing it into the cruellest

of all bondage to the law of sin, which is in my members. Oh! if thou canst, deliver me from the body of that death!" Suppose, in answer to such complaints it was said, "You must be born again," one might imagine the man's perplexity, and perhaps despair at such a reply. And yet it would be the truest, the best, nay, only remedy; and ere long we should hear from the patient's own heart and lips the joyous acknowledgment, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Remember, however, that it is not enough to talk about it, or to explain, or to comprehend it—you *must be* born again—and I think you can hardly mistake, if such a work has been wrought in you by the Holy Spirit of God. You may not know the date of your birth; you may even tremblingly ask if it be true; but you can tell whether the current of your thoughts be heavenwards instead of earthwards—whether your affections are set on things above, and not on things of the earth—and whether you too can say with him of old, "To me to live is Christ." "I count all things but loss, so that I may win Christ."

SECTION XIII.

(Chapter iii. verse 14—15.)

THE incident to which our Lord here alludes

is recorded in the 21st chapter of the book of Numbers, and amid the many types of Christ in the pages of the Old Testament, this of the brazen serpent is perhaps the most striking and the most accurate in the adaptation of its several parts to the circumstances of that miracle. I do not know that it is necessary that a type should be exact in all its bearings—it is sufficient, if in its more general features it presents a correct, and not to be mistaken likeness. But in this of the brazen serpent, the type and the antitype assimilate so exactly that one can hardly suggest a feature in the one which has not its counterpart in the other. It is not however so much to these coincidences that I would now direct your attention, as to the great fact here so graphically portrayed, that all mankind, like the thousands of Israel bitten by the venomous and fiery serpents, were perishing under a disease as deadly as that which raged amid the hosts of Israel in the wilderness. There was no known remedy for the wound of the serpent—each one, as he received the venom into his system, was struck with death, and inevitably fell a victim to the poison. It was in this extremity, that God's opportunity was found, and found in a way that no human ingenuity, no device of man would ever have suggested, and far less could have rendered effectual to a cure. Humanly speaking, too, no remedy could have been devised in such apparent mockery of the case, as to fashion a brazen serpent,

erect it on a pole, and bid every bitten one, every dying one simply look at it, with the assurance that he should be healed. But it was so: not a single instance occurred of failure or disappointment; "it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." The moving principle in the wounded Israelite was conviction of his danger and impending death, and faith and confidence in the remedy proposed, in the relief proffered to him. He did not question its apparent insufficiency, its almost mockery of his case, but with grateful and instant eagerness embraced it, turned to the uplifted emblem of his safety, and found healing as he gazed.

And is not the same moving principle required in the diseased and dying sinner to lead him to look to Jesus? Must not he be convinced of sin, must he not feel within himself that he is ready to perish? And when the way of salvation through a crucified Saviour is pointed out, and he is told that Jesus is set forth for the healing of every bruised and dying one, must not the same faith, which led a wounded Israelite to strain his dying sight on the lifeless emblem, lead the sinner also to look on Him, who was alike lifted up and died upon the cross? It is the very invitation, which Jesus gives, "Look unto me, all the ends of the earth, and be ye saved."

I do not know any portion of Scripture, which so strikingly lays down the three great cardinal

truths of the Gospel, as are to be found in the brief compass of this conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus—ruin by the fall—redemption by Jesus Christ—and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. It was no partial taint, no mere surface malady, no skin-deep disease alone, which demanded such a remedy as our Lord here declared to be necessary ; it was a pulling down as it were of the old edifice, and rebuilding it anew—a casting off altogether of the “garment spotted by the flesh,” a putting off entirely of the old man, and putting on the new man, with new understanding, new affections, new desires. It is not repair, nor restoration, nor working up of old materials, no putting even of a piece of new cloth into the old garment, that can meet the urgency and necessity of the case, “Ye *must be born again.*” It is like the leprosy breaking out in a house, when the priest was commanded to “break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house, and to carry them forth out of the city, into an unclean place.” What a type of the inveteracy of sin, of the wide-spread ineradicable ruin of the fall ! Nor can language be plainer as to the agent employed in this mighty work of regeneration, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” “It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.” “The Spirit is life, because of righteousness,” and “as many as are led by the Spirit of

God, they are the sons of God," for "that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." Nor, again, can I conceive any declaration of the redemption that is in Jesus so powerful, so striking, and appropriate as that type to which our Lord here refers of the brazen serpent, that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

I would say then "Look unto the rock, whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit, whence ye digged;" see the depth and peril of your fall—and "forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ," and seeing too that "ye are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible," through the Spirit, "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

SECTION XIV.

(Chapter iii. verses 16, 17.)

"God is love," said the beloved disciple in his epistle—and surely there never was a fuller nor more touching commentary on that text, than what the same disciple has recorded in this portion of his Gospel. One can speak of human love, and

judge of it by the sacrifices it makes; and assuredly even earthly love has attained to great heights, and even laid down its life for the object of its affections; though the apostle Paul introduces such an exhibition with a "peradventure," as if, in the moment of need, human love might shrink from such a trial, "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet *peradventure* for a good man some would even dare to die." How striking then the climax, which the same apostle adds, "But God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;" and so here St. John records the same gracious truth, that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Had the verse ran simply thus, "God loved the world," it would have been a glorious and a precious truth; but what a wondrous addition does that little word "*so*" make to the magnitude of God's love. "God *so* loved the world," with such a fulness of love, with such an overflowing of tenderness, and compassion, and pity, to such an extent, to such an height of love that it could only exhibit itself in the mightiest sacrifice, in the greatest surrender that infinite love could devise or execute. And this too not from any outward strain or pressure, not from any responsive feeling in the object of His love, calling into being His own love—not for any attraction in the world that could engage,

or win, or dignify, or deserve His love, or even disarm His wrath—not from any inherent attribute or correspondent quality in man that might demand His love, but from His own essence, His own eternal character of love. And what was the purpose for which this wondrous love was exhibited? It had not one particle of wrath, not one moment's looking back on man's guilt and disobedience, for the purpose of condemning or excluding any, or withholding ought that was in God's heart to give—there was not even the shadow of a cloud to pass over the brightness of that love—its whole purpose was mercy, its whole constraining motive, love. Unlike the previous dispensation by Moses, it was confined to no one age, no one people or nation; it comprehended all time, it embraced all earth: "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Oh! bless God for that "matchless word, 'whosoever'"—it not only takes in Nicodemus, to whom the Saviour uttered this glorious assurance—it takes in those who listened, and heard, and believed on Him when on earth—but it does far more; it has taken in all who have believed on Him through their word: "You may fill it in with your name, I with mine, each with his, and all with theirs."

We may well ask then in sorrow and surprize, why it is that so much love is disappointed, so much grace frustrated, so much mercy of none

effect? I do not think we could give any answer to such a painful question, did not Jesus intimate the reason in that declaration to Nicodemus, when He names the remedy; "Ye must be born again." It is because "the carnal natural mind is enmity against God," because to every proposition of God's love, the invariable answer of the unchanged and unrenewed heart of man is, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" "Who is the Lord, that we should serve Him?" "There is, however, blessed be God, no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit;" and, therefore, let me say to you, as Jesus, so touchingly but so reprovably, said to some, "Will ye also go away?" Will you be condemned with the world, and when God has *so* loved you as to give His only-begotten Son for you, will you *so* despise His gift, as to tread under your feet the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace? Remember your inheritance, the great things God has prepared for them that love Him. All things are yours; things present and things to come; things in time and in eternity—life and death—all are yours, secured by that indissoluble bond, because "ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

SECTION XV.

(Chapter iii. verse 18—21.)

WE are very apt to think that the condemnation which awaits the sinner is to be after death ; we carry our thoughts onwards to and beyond the grave to that eternity of penalty which does assuredly befall the impenitent and unbelieving there. I do not say we are wrong in doing this, for most certainly the never-ending irrevocable doom is then the sinner's portion : but we are most authoritatively, and yet tenderly, warned that the condemnation of the wicked and unbelieving begins even in the present life. " He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." I do not suppose that our Lord here meant to say to Nicodemus, or that Nicodemus should believe that punishment, the actual suffering of punishment for sin commenced at the very moment of sin ; far from it. To the sinner's gaze, and to those who look upon him, there is no outward difference ; in many a case all goes on as smoothly, as brightly as before,—perhaps more so, for wickedness is often successful. But what our Lord meant to intimate was, that sentence upon, or condemnation for sin, was passed at the very moment of that sin's completion : that, however, the execu-

tion of the sentence might be delayed, it was suspended over the sinner's head, and would infallibly fall on him. As it was in Paradise, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," that was the sentence denounced on disobedience; and yet many and many a year passed over the guilty pair ere the temporal punishment fell on them. But Jesus goes far beyond this in His solemn warning, and assures Nicodemus that the condemnation passed upon the impenitent and unbelieving is actually working, though it may be invisibly to others, and unconsciously to the sinner himself: that darkness and impenitency are gradually closing around him; that the heart is becoming more and more callous and indifferent; that the disinclination to holy things is every day growing more and more into aversion and disgust; that the light of truth is hateful as well as painful, and that he shuts his eyes and his heart against conviction, till at length conscience ceases to rebuke, the Holy Spirit withdraws, and refuses to strive with him any more, and the unhappy sinner is at length and for ever shut up in the blackness and darkness of impenitency and unbelief. It is indeed a sad and awful condition, but it was strikingly illustrated in the case of the Jews, and Nicodemus must, in his future intercourse with his nation, have been painfully struck with the accuracy of our Lord's statements as regarded his own countrymen, when, in the strong language of the

prophet, "The Lord gave them obstinacy of heart, and His curse unto them." The lesson, however, to ourselves is as awful as it is strong. In a literal sense, there is nothing which a sinner dreads so much as the darkness, and yet with strange inconsistency he chooses darkness for his most guilty deeds. Truth, however, is the light which the sinner most hates and dreads. And this at once shews us at what a distance the sinner is from God. God is truth, and the sinner hates truth; God is light, and the sinner hates light; and what an aggravation of the sinner's condemnation that light is come into the world, that true light, which would be a guide and a safeguard to every man that cometh into the world; and yet men prefer darkness, because their deeds are evil. They blush not indeed to commit sin, though they would blush to confess it before men, and shrink from the light which would make it manifest. They were no vain nor empty words which Moses uttered when he said, "Be sure your sin will find you out;" and as "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," so "is it condemned already." What a fearful climax of condemnation is here laid before the unbeliever,—present, certain, and inevitable condemnation. You may indeed ask, is there no remedy? is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why must this pain be perpetual, and this wound incurable? These are very solemn questions, and very solemn too is the answer. The unbeliever is

as the bitten Israelite refusing to look upon the brazen serpent, turning away from the only remedy that could save him, the only hope that could meet his case; not only sinning against, but sinning away mercy! "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." How awful then, but irresistible, is the conclusion which Jesus here enforces, that "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." "Take heed, brethren," says the apostle, "lest there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

SECTION XVI.

(Chapter iii. verse 22 to the end.)

It is a sad evidence of the infirmity that attaches even to good and holy men, to witness the feeling of envy and jealousy that existed in the minds of these disciples of John, as to their Master's diminished influence and popularity, and the encreasing favour and regard which was shewn to Jesus. It was no doubt a natural feeling, and, at first sight, one might almost say a feeling that did them honour, to be thus vigilant and anxious for their Master's reputation: but how truly does it illustrate the declaration, that "what is esteemed

among men is abomination in the sight of God." The very words they use, the very terms in which they speak of Jesus, betray the rankling envy in their hearts; and, though their desire was mainly for their Master's honour, yet their own was no doubt in some degree mixed up with it; and they plainly enough intimate that, in their opinion, John himself had been unnecessarily accessory to his own diminished influence, by the unhesitating testimony he had borne to Jesus, and all but insinuate that had he held his peace, his own name would have been held in higher honour. "Master, He that was with thee beyond Jordan" is the way they speak of Jesus; the almost scornful terms by which they designate Him. "To whom thou bearest witness"—see the effects of your own rash and hasty testimony, and the unfair advantage taken of your candour—"behold, the same baptizeth" as well as thou, and "all men flock to Him," and thou art left unhonoured and deserted. Alas! how true is it what the apostle James says, that "the Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy," and how rarely can we look on others, passing us as it were in the race of life, without envy, jealousy, and depreciation. It is indeed a grace of rare attainment, and never grows in the natural soil of man's heart.

In the present instance it might be said, that these disciples were not so envious on their own as on their Master's account; but I fear it was not

so, and that their own feelings of inferiority added bitterness to their remarks. We are distinctly told in the next chapter that Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples: and no doubt the disciples of the one contrasted their own inferiority with the permitted privileges of the others, and envied them accordingly. And thus, even in these men, holy, and zealous, and earnest as they were, a spirit of envy is found lurking: even where grace has begun its work in the heart, where a desire for the glory of God is predominant, and one would wish to do all for the glory of God, even there a sigh may sometimes arise, a shade of repining may occasionally darken the features as one sees one after another of those with whom we started on our race, or those who started long after us, attain to notice, distinction, or competency, and we ourselves left immeasurably behind. It is a feeling, I suspect, that must often cross many a man's mind, and if indulged, if cherished, if not instantly cast out with a "Get thee behind me, Satan," would lead to much of sin, as well as disquiet. And perhaps the best remedy I can suggest is, to read this answer of the Baptist to his well-meaning, but ill-judging, disciples. Once receive that truth into the heart, with which the Baptist here begins, and there is an end to all envy, repining, or disappointment. "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." Each man's place is assigned him, in the

Lord's family, according to his Father's will. The prosperity that bears him onward, or the adversity that keeps him low,—the sunshine that brightens, or the cloud that darkens,—are all appointed of God. And as to His church, He has given some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ; so in His more extended family He apportions the heritage and the lot of each. And I confess I love to see the Lord's appointment in all, and to trace with what wisdom as well as bounty He has assigned to each his different portion, and to feel and to be assured that He is looking with as much, nay, it may be, with more, approval on the cheerful alacrity with which the lowest sets about and fulfils the duties of their station, doing them as unto the Lord, and not unto men, as on the more observed and prominent services of those in more exalted posts.

And as I have noticed the first verse of the Baptist's reply, so I would just make one remark on the awful truth with which he closes, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not"—or, more accurately, he that *obeyeth not*—"the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." As Bishop Jebb remarks, it is "a magnificently awful, descending series."* He who, with his heart, believeth on

* Jebb's *Sacred Literature*, p. 149.

the Son, is *already* in possession of eternal life; he who obeyeth not the Son, whatever may be his outward profession, not only does not possess *eternal* life, he does not possess anything worthy to be called *life at all*, nor, so persisting, ever can *possess*, for he shall not even *see it*. But this is not all, for as eternal life is the *present possession* of the faithful, so the wrath of God is the *present and permanent* lot of the disobedient—it “abideth on him.” How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.

SECTION XVII.

(Chap. iv. verse 1—8).

OUR Lord, you may remember, described Himself as One who “came to seek and to save that which was lost.” And this chapter affords a touching and striking illustration of this His errand. I do not mean to say that Jesus avowedly went to this city of Samaria on purpose to seek out this lost one of His fold. He did this on some occasions; in many an instance His sole errand would seem to have been to meet, and console, and speak peace to some broken-hearted, torn, and wounded one of His flock. But I would wish you to look at the present case as one of those instances, in which what we are apt to call the casual circum-

stances, the common occurrences, or the accidents of life, are yet so strikingly over-ruled by God for the purposes of His love and mercy, His sovereign and electing grace, that one would think few could overlook or mistake, that from first to last the providence of God was especially and minutely directing every incident. We might say, for instance, that it was a very natural, and almost casual, circumstance that our Lord should now for a season withdraw from Judæa, where the enmity of the Pharisees had been stirred up against Him, and retire to His own more immediate country of Galilee to minister among His own people. It was no caprice, nor even choice that selected His road—it was the common route of every traveller, or as the evangelist words it, it was a “must needs” be that led Him through Samaria. One glance at the map would shew you that a traveller in passing from Judæa to Galilee “must needs go through Samaria.” It was therefore but in the natural progress of His journey, that now, at even-tide, He reached this little village of Sychar, and there wearied and worn with fatigue, and heat, and the day’s travel, it was natural that He should rest for a while on an ancient well which had been dug there, and which the patriarch Jacob had won from the Amorite with his sword and with his bow, and had given to his favourite Joseph. It was too the usual evening hour of drawing water, was no extraordinary occurrence that led

this woman there at the very period that Jesus was resting there. Women were the usual water-drawers in the East. Jacob's own mother, you remember, had been first met and recognized at a well. Moses had found the daughters of Midian by a well's side, and no doubt this woman of Sychar had come on many a previous evening on the same necessary errand. All these then, we may say, were, in the usual meaning of the expression, the mere ordinary occurrences of life, and yet how manifestly, how wondrously were they overruled of God, and rendered subservient to the one great and gracious purpose, for which Jesus came into this world of sin and sorrow, "to save that which was lost." Before however we enter upon the interview between the blessed Jesus, and this lost one from His fold, I would make one or two remarks which seem to arise from this preliminary part of our subject. It may indeed be said, literally, of the holy Jesus that He went about doing good; and as He emphatically declared of Himself, as regarded this interview, "His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work;" and no weariness of body, no exhaustion of spirit, no reproach thrown upon His motives and His conduct, no disappointment in His labours of love could for one moment hinder the solemn purpose of His life. Not only in the temple or the synagogue, but beneath the private roof,—not only at the stated

seasons of teaching, but even at the social meal—in the public streets, by the road-side—on the sea-shore, while journeying from village to village, or town to town; or, as here, resting His wearied frame by a well-side, wherever an opportunity presented itself, or an incident afforded an opening for spiritual improvement—whether gazing on the fields, rich with the fruits of harvest, or seeking food from a barren fig-tree—whether the lily spread before Him its gorgeous blossoms, or the sycamore its shade, or the well its water, all and each were made the means of holy conversation, of instruction to the ignorant, and consolation to the sorrowing. In the last chapter we found Jesus arguing in the night-season with a ruler of the Jews—now it is at even-tide with a woman of Samaria: and I would add, that however unfavourable the circumstances of both cases were in their earlier stages, however apparently darkened the understanding of the learned Pharisee, and however degraded the condition and sinful the life of this unhappy woman of Sychar, still they were both, in God's own time, gathered into the fold, and are now rejoicing in the realms of glory; the one that he was mysteriously, but mercifully led to seek the Saviour, though beneath the shades of night; the other in that apparently casual, but heaven-sent hour, when she first saw the toil-worn traveller by the side of Jacob's well. I believe it **he truly said that no man knows, nor ever will**

know, the opportunities of doing good, which are lost through indolence, or indifference, or disregard of souls. He who lays himself most open to them will find them meeting him at every turn. Has it ever occurred to any of us that we have turned aside from an opportunity of doing good, because we have been discouraged by outward appearances? Has it ever happened that we have been thrown into casual contact with one who has been an alien to the privileges we enjoy, and the hopes which cheer ourselves; or, it may be, one who like this Samaritan woman, has lived a life of heartlessness and sin, and we have grudged a word of peace, of consolation, or of warning? Oh, let me say to you, and to my own heart, if through weariness of body, or of mind, if through outward discouragement, or that fear of man, which bringeth a snare, if through mistaken pride, or a spirit of self-righteous complacency, we have ever turned aside from an occasion, or even the hope, of doing good, when our hand found it do, let us, in self-abasement, remember the blessed Jesus by the side of Jacob's well.

SECTION XVIII.

(Chapter iv. verse 9—13.)

How nearly was this woman putting far from her

for ever, the gracious message of pardon, and peace, and reconciliation! How instantly did prejudice rise up and seek to thwart the Lord's purposes of love towards her! "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" asks the apostle, "Come they not hence, even of your lusts which war in your members?" It is sad when enmity against our fellow-creatures exists, whether it be in nations or in families; it is still more sad when those who worship the same God are yet separated by religious animosity. It had been so of old between Israel and Judah, when more especially brethren; separated by political barriers, they were still more estranged by religious division: and it continued even unto our Saviour's time, only with increased bitterness and more sectarian exclusion. I do not now speak of national enmities, of the ambition of kings, and the selfish aggrandizement of conquerors! An oriental proverb has said that "ten dervises shall sleep in peace on a single carpet, while two kings shall quarrel, though they have kingdoms to divide them;" but I would simply speak of religious differences; how sad that so much of unkindness, of exasperation, and mutual denunciation should exist between those who profess to love and serve the same God and Saviour, and who hope, through grace, hereafter to live together in the same heaven.

The Samaritans were no doubt the separatists: our Lord, even in this interview, decides the ques-

tion in favour of the Jews, when He declared that "Salvation is of the Jews." Yet I think we discover unmistakeable signs that He shared not, and gave no sanction to those feelings, which would have excluded the Samaritans from any participation in the blessings of the covenant, because they worshipped on Gerizim, and not at Jerusalem. In one instance only (and for that there was an especial reason) did He seem for a moment to draw a line of distinction between the Samaritan and the Jew, when He said, "Into any village of the Samaritans enter ye not;" but we cannot forget how, in the parable of the wounded traveller, He drew his portrait of humanity and love from a Samaritan, and how still more forcibly He rebuked even his beloved disciple for the untempered zeal, which would have called down fire on a Samaritan village; and in the incident recorded in this chapter we see with what especial tenderness and love He makes this interview a means of grace, not only to this woman's soul, but to many a believing one in Sychar besides.

I can well believe the astonishment expressed by His disciples, when they saw Him thus in friendly intercourse with a woman of this hated race; but how quietly, how gently, does He correct this mistake, and pointing to the spiritual field of Samaria, declare that even there was there an abundant harvest ready to be gathered! And how still more completely must He have broken down

the barriers of their prejudice, when they saw their Master tarrying for two whole days among the inhabitants of Sychar, for the sole purpose of gathering in with His own hands some of that ripened harvest, and preaching to them far more successfully than He had done in the cities of Judah, or their own land of Galilee! "If thou knewest the gift of God," said Jesus to this woman. Alas! it is because we do not know the gift of God, how impartial, how universal, how without respect of persons it is! how like his own pervading essence, who maketh His sun to shine and His rain to fall on all alike!

So "God willeth not that any should perish; but that in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." We may truly say of this the best gift of God, that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," and man's bitterness of spirit is sadly at variance with God's spirit of love. It is God's *gift*, for "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" whosoever he be, Jew or Samaritan, Greek or Barbarian, bond or free; that "in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ." I do not say, let there be no strife among us; St. Paul said, "Covet earnestly," though the tenth commandment forbade to covet; but, as he added


“Covet earnestly the best gifts;” so, though the Scripture says, “The servant of the Lord must not strive,” I would add, let our strife be, which shall love God most, and our fellow-creatures best.

SECTION XIX.

Chapter iv. verse 13—15.)

It is a very striking contrast which Jesus here draws between temporal and spiritual mercies under the imagery of water: “Whosoever shall drink of this water shall thirst again.” It would be but a temporary refreshment at the best; a few hours hence, a little more toil, a brief period longer of noon-day heat, and the thirst would recur again, and need once more to be slaked at the fountain or the well. It is the same with our daily bread; it satisfieth for to-day, but the hunger returns to-morrow: and even then it can but prolong life,—it cannot secure against disease or death. And there are seasons in which we turn aside from it in loathing or indifference. “Your fathers,” said Jesus to the Jews, “did eat manna in the wilderness,—and are dead.” And the same unsubstantial character adheres to every earthly blessing and enjoyment; it is unsatisfying, and it passeth away; it is the appointed tenure by which we hold them: and though many a one looks upon life’s pleasures

and earth's treasures as very different in their character, and as possessing both substance and permanency, yet not only upon man himself, but upon all that appertaineth to man, is that sentence written, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." But at the very moment and in the same breath in which the Saviour proclaims the incompleteness and insufficiency of earth's resources, He proclaims the gushing forth from its fountain of that river, the streams whereof make glad not only the city of our God, but the remotest and most secluded habitations of men. It is not, however, merely the streams making and finding their silent course, and fertilizing wherever they flow, but it is, as it were, the living fountain of living waters springing up in each man's heart, and gushing forth, as from its source, in streams of love and goodwill to man, sanctifying and consecrating to the glory of God all that is within, and all that issues out. "The water that I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up into everlasting life." *We* know well what our Lord meant by this imagery, for on an after occasion, when Jesus used the very same figure, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters," the evangelist adds, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." I would just observe here, what a striking testimony does this passage give to the divinity of Christ, and to his equality with the Father. "I



and my Father are one,"—one in power, in will, in purpose, as in essence. Jesus, on another occasion, comparing our heavenly Father's love with that of an earthly parent, said, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!" In this passage the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Father's gift; yet here Jesus tells this woman, "Hadst thou asked Me, I would have given thee living water," or the Holy Spirit; so that the gift of the Holy Spirit is alike in the Father and in the Son. It was for this especial purpose that He left this earth; it was with this promise that He comforted His disciples, when, as they feared, they were to be left desolate: "I will not leave you comfortless: if I go not away, the Comforter will not come, but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." It is indeed a blessed truth; yet how slow to receive it was this poor woman,—willing enough to accept Christ's boon for an earthly good and convenience, to spare her own labour and lighten her daily burden; looking only to the narrow confines of this life's wants and trials: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." And I fear that there are still in the vast majority, even of those that believe in His name, the same low views of Christ, the same degrading and derogatory apprehensions of His work, as if to receive Christ was immediately to receive some tangible earthly good, something that might be seen and felt and

handled; and consequently, by and bye, when persecution ariseth because of the Word, when the cross comes and says, "Take up me," then they are offended, and look upon themselves as ill treated and deceived. Alas! who is not by nature to the full as ignorant of the gift of God, and of Him who has it to bestow, as this woman of Samaria? Who, among all the children of Adam, till they have received the teaching of the Holy Spirit, can ever know that there is a fountain of living water springing up unto everlasting life, a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,—who, even if he did know it, could tell the way which leads to it, till Jesus revealed Himself as "the way, the truth, and the life;" or even then cry, in a right spirit, "Give me this water, that I thirst not," till the Spirit put that cry into his heart? We are all, I am afraid, too apt to take Christ for "the houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands" He promises, forgetful that He has added to the list "with persecutions;" and forgetful also that He has said of all earth's blessings, "Whosoever drinketh of these waters shall thirst again." We are all ready to go to Christ for the "nether springs," though He is as willing to give "the upper" also. We can pray to Him for time, while we put out of sight that our inheritance is for eternity.

SECTION XX.

Chapter iv. verse 16—26.

THE dialogue between our Lord and the woman of Samaria encreases, not only in interest, but in close and searching application: and our Lord's management, if we may so call it, of His portion of it affords a very valuable lesson as to ministerial dealing with the yet unawakened, unalarmed sinner. He had excited a desire after an unknown good; He had stirred up a longing for some blessing promised, but at the first misunderstood. "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." She was willing to receive a benefit, even though proffered by a Jew; and the tone of her reply shews that her heart was softened, and the way prepared for a further advance. The next step was to convince her of her sin. It is indeed the foundation of all conversion: till the heart sees, feels, and acknowledges its sin, no ground is gained. We must be convinced of sin ere we can repent of it; we must feel and bewail the condition to which sin has reduced us, ere we can cry earnestly for deliverance. It is indeed the work of the Spirit, it is the office of the Holy Ghost to convince sinners of their sin; and without Him, the work is undone, but the Holy Spirit often condescends to work by the in-

strumentality of man, and the first step, which the faithful minister of Christ will take, will be the endeavour, in dependance on that promised aid, that "his sin shall find the sinner out." He will go, however, discreetly to work: with the tact of a Nathan, he will perhaps approach the sinner with some indirect detail that may touch his feelings, and elicit unsuspected condemnation: or, as our Lord in the present instance does by a reference to matters apparently unconnected with the subject in question, and which yet, so unexpectedly, go home as it were to the very point. "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." It was, to all appearance, the most harmless of all directions—and yet what momentous consequences resulted from it; consequences that eternity can never exhaust, consequences which are even now among the hallelujahs and thanksgivings of heaven. "I have no husband," was the woman's reply. I do not imagine that at this moment conviction of sin had wrought its work, its perfect work—there was however the germ of grace—she dared not tell a falsehood; and looking only to the present moment, and without a reference to the guilty past, she says, "I have no husband." Now then was the moment, now then was that declaration of Moses to be made true: "Be sure your sin will find you out:" and Jesus proceeds to lay bare all the guilty uncleanness and infidelity of her former life. Oh! what an hour! what a moment, when

the Holy Spirit of God, the spirit of unerring truth, the God of all remembrance, shall turn the sinner's eye, in the full blaze of light, on the hitherto darkened chambers of his own heart, when he shall see his sin in all its unmitigated abomination as committed against a pure and holy God, in whose sight the very heavens are unclean. And yet even there, for the moment, there may be resentings, there may be strugglings as with Ephraim, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;" or there may be with Saul "kickings against the pricks;" or as with this poor woman, evasions and attempts to throw off the subject, and turn to another theme. It was indeed a point of religious disputation between a Jew and a Samaritan, whether the temple at Jerusalem, or that on Mount Gerizim, was the proper place to worship in, but what had that to do with her own guilty state before God? There was an hour soon coming to her, and indeed to us all, when these human distinctions shall cease, when denominations shall be at an end, and sects and parties be no more; and when one alone distinction will survive every wreck, and He only who has worshipped God in spirit and in truth, will be sought and owned. How beautifully and closely does the blessed Jesus reveal the truth that God is a Spirit, and that the only worship pleasing to Him must be spiritual

worship, the only service heart-service! How must the veil of her former ignorance, self-delusion, formality, and hypocrisy have fallen from her eyes, and prepared her heart for the revelation of a Saviour! Nor was it withheld; and, as far as this woman is concerned, the conference closes with that gracious manifestation of Himself as Messiah or Christ, which never yet was made in vain.

The Holy Scriptures indeed from henceforward throw a veil over her future course, as they do over many, of whom we have every reason to hope that they were gathered into Christ's fold. Of the demoniac at Gadara, we know no more than that he began to publish the great things God had done for him; of the Ethiopian eunuch, we hear only that he went on his way rejoicing; of Zacchæus, only that the Saviour declared that that day had salvation come to his house. And so it is with this once-misguided woman of Samaria; from the day that Jesus quitted Sychar, the page of her life is closed, till it be re-opened on that day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known. But do we, can we, doubt that she was herself among that happy number who believed? "The woman saith unto Him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He."

I believe, and am fully persuaded, that Jesus never yet revealed Himself in mercy and in love to any human soul,—and that soul perished! I

believe that where He has manifested Himself with that power, which led the woman of Samaria to say, "Is not this the Christ?" and to receive that blessed truth into the heart, that soul is, as it were, graven upon the palms of the Lord's hands, and his name written in the Lamb's book of life. May the Lord in His mercy so reveal Himself to our hearts; may His willingness, in the day of His power, be so manifested to us, that we may not only be found written in the book of the Lord's remembrance, but in that book of life, where the names of those of our brothers and our sisters, who through tribulation have inherited the promise, are I doubt not everlastingly recorded!

SECTION XXI.

(Chapter iv. verse 27—42.)

It is painful to think how, in this world of envy, jealousy, and depreciation, the good even of the best is traduced and misrepresented; how ready men are to impute erroneous motives and draw erroneous inferences even from the simplest and the purest actions. Few among the sons of men were so exposed to calumny, I might almost say to coarse invective, as the blessed Jesus. "Thou

art a Samaritan ;” “Thou hast a devil ;” “A gluttonous man and a wine bibber ;” “A friend of publicans and sinners ;” were among the reiterated insults heaped on the holy head of Jesus. He might have said with His type, the persecuted Psalmist, “They daily mistake my words.” It is sad too to find, as here, that those who knew Him best, those who even loved and honoured Him, should have occasionally joined the multitude in mistaking His words, and perverting His deeds of mercy. We read of His own relatives on one occasion saying of Him, “He is beside Himself,” and here His disciples marvelled that he condescended to converse with a Samaritan woman. They did not indeed express it in words, but still their Jewish prejudices could not be restrained, and they were offended at their Master’s condescension to one of that hated race, though it were in truth to convert a sinner from the error of his way, and to save a soul from death. Let us be on our guard against this spirit of detraction and misrepresentation ; it is very insidious in its approaches, and is too prevalent at all times, even among the children of God.

There is too much of the unfilial character of Ham, too little of the tender reverence of Shem and Japhet, in this world of malevolence and unkindness. Jesus, however, though he well knew the thoughts which were passing through the minds of his disciples, utters not a word of reproach ;

nay, He makes no direct allusion to them, but in reply to their solicitations to partake of the food they had brought with them, He leads them to reflect on the errand for which He came into the world, and how that mission was to seek and to save that which was lost: that far beyond the craving of the natural appetite, far more than the wants of hunger, "His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish his work." Oh! that there were such a mind in ourselves, that we were seeking and striving and praying to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ, and to have more of the same mind that was in Him. Our Lord speaks, not merely of the ripening, but of the ripened harvest, and I would say to you, as well as bind it on my own conscience, "Whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might." Whatever it be,—whether it be missionary work abroad or missionary work at home; whether it be in seeking out the poor and the destitute of God's family, or in speaking a word in season to the poor outcast and wanderer from the fold, or the thousand thousand ways of doing good that are ever meeting him who is in search for them; remember that life is the only season for these works of charity and love. Others have already laboured, and we are entered into their labours to carry them on with the same fervour of benevolence and zeal. Remember too that in heaven there will be no sick to tend; no destitute

to nourish ; no naked to clothe ; no fatherless and widows to visit ; no poor to preach the Gospel to ; no heathen to reclaim. All opportunities of good, and all means of doing good, will end with this life. I confess I love to trace encouragement for the work, even where all was most discouraging, in this incident in our Lord's life.

Few scenes of ministerial labour could present an aspect so repelling as a Samaritan village to a Jewish teacher. One village, we know, refused to receive Him, and yet now another beseeches Him to tarry among them. Happy indeed the day for Sychar when the Saviour deigned to tarry there ; and how truly did it prove now, what it once was under the law, "a city of refuge" to those that were ready to perish ! How different too the feelings of these humble Shechemites from the worldly-minded carnal traffickers of Gadara—the one besought Him to depart from them, the other to tarry in their city. Nor is it devoid of interest, nay, far beyond that, I believe a most significant lesson is conveyed to us in the present state of Sychar, as described by modern travellers, most unmistakeably illustrating our Lord's declaration, "Them that honour Me, I will honour." Capernaüm, the capital of Galilee, which was exalted unto heaven, where Jesus preached in vain, is brought down to hell, being nothing now but shapeless ruins, like Chorazin and Bethsaida. Samaria herself is "cast down into the valley ; and


Sychar,* the favoured of the Lord, where so many heard the words of Jesus and believed on him, is to this day in its present fertility, "embosomed amid fragrant bowers, and surrounded by luxuriant gardens and stately trees,—a striking exception to the general desolation, which has left but a remembrance and a name of the cities of Judah, of Samaria, and Galilee." How true is the prophet's assertion: "A little one shall become a thousand; they that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured learn doctrine."

* The modern Nablous. The entrance to Nablous has been thus described: "'Nablous,' an Oriental corruption of 'Neapolis,' is the representative of the city built by the Romans under the latter name. Few places in the Holy Land are so beautifully situated. It is, however, more justly to be considered as a rebuilding of the Shechem of the Old, and the Sychar of the New Testament, at one time the capital of Samaria and city of high renown. It is approached through a long avenue of ancient olive-trees, and lies in a narrow valley, having Mount Ebal on the northern and Mount Gerizim on the southern side of the view. Its situation, nearly at the summit of the valley, causes the waters on its coast to flow off in various directions. On either side the mountains rising boldly, with a general character of sterility, increase the beauty of the fertile valley, as Nablous appears embosomed in gardens and groves of fig, mulberry, and other fruit trees. The author thus writes, describing his approach to the city;—'A scene of luxuriant and almost unparalleled verdure burst upon our view. The whole valley was filled with gardens of vegetables, and orchards of all kinds of fruit, watered by several fountains, which, bursting forth in several parts, flow westward in refreshing streams. It came upon us suddenly like a scene of enchantment.'—*Bib. Res.*, vol. iii. 9, 6.)"

SECTION XXII.

(Chapter iv. verse 43 to the end).

IN this miracle of healing the nobleman's son, which is recorded by St. John alone, there is much to interest our best feelings, as well as instruct and edify. But let us just dwell a moment or two on the preceding verses. Our Lord had passed through Samaria, where His stay had been marked by so much of love and mercy, and had now entered Galilee. And yet He, who had not hesitated to linger in Samaria to win souls, now passes by ungrateful, murderous Nazareth, though it had once been the home of His earthly parent, and the abode of His own childhood, and proceeds at once to Cana, the scene of His first miracle. It is a very striking but awful illustration of the Lord's sovereign and electing grace, as declared by the apostle, "He will have mercy, on whom He will have mercy; and whom He will, He hardeneth." Samaria was white already to harvest, but Nazareth was like the beaten highway, or hard as the rocky hill on the brow of which it was built. And yet Nazareth had been the especial object of many a spiritual privilege, while Samaria had apparently been rejected, or at least disregarded of the Lord. Our Saviour gives us a clue to this in the proverb He quotes, that a "prophet hath no honour in his



own country." At first sight, indeed, one would think it would be just the reverse, and that those who knew a good man best would love and honour him most; and yet experience unhappily justifies the saying; and why is it so? is it that a nearer acquaintance and a closer insight into a man's character and walk in life discloses defects, and inconsistencies, and blemishes, which necessarily diminish respect, but which a greater distance conceals, and more imperfect acquaintance does not so readily detect. It may be so; I feel it painfully true of myself, and I suppose others must feel the same; and St. Paul felt it more keenly than any, that "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" and that those very qualities and graces for which the partiality of friendship and the blindness of affection gives credit, are in reality so stained with sin and marred by inconsistency, and so much that must be offensive is so continually stirring and bubbling up, that those who look the closest, and see the clearest, can hardly honour, without somewhat of reserve, even the best of men. But this could not be so in the present case—nor indeed do I think that in any it explains or justifies the proverb. I fear we must resolve it into something far more derogatory to human nature—and that the saying is founded on that jealousy and envy inherent in our nature, which looks askance on those who have dwelt among us, whom we have known from childhood, and looked down upon as

inferior to ourselves ; but who have passed us on the road, and gained that eminence and reputation which we may have sought in vain, and whose very good name is a sort of tacit slur and reproach upon ourselves. There is something too of that feeling, which induced the Athenian citizen to vote for the banishment of Aristides, not because Aristides had done any wrong, but because, as he acknowledged, "he was tired at hearing him so continually called 'the Just.'" There is no doubt unhappily a disposition which loves to depreciate a fellow-creature, especially if we have once known him in an inferior grade, and which takes a real but low pleasure in casting a sneer or a jibe on his former condition. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" was the very sneer of the Nazarenes—"Is not His mother called Mary—and His brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas—and His sisters, are they not all with us? And they were offended at Him." I think, therefore, we may rest the truth of the proverb on that inherent envy of man's heart, which grudges another's superiority in any way, and longs to pull all down to its own level.

Who this nobleman at Capernaum was whose son was sick we are not told; but tradition assigns the incident to Chuza, Herod's steward, whose wife, Joanna, is mentioned among those pious women who ministered to the Lord of their substance; and, if this tradition be true, it is a pleasing and touching record of a mother's love and gratitude, who, in


return for such a blessing bestowed upon herself, as the recovery of her son from sickness and death, gladly gave of such as she had. I cannot say that I see that weakness of faith in this poor anxious father, which some have remarked. Imperfection no doubt there was, and, alas! whose faith in the hour of deep trial and emergency does not feel a momentary sinking and misgiving! who, as he walks upon the stormy waves of such a sorrow as a beloved one's approaching death, even though he can go to and lay hold on Him who alone can heal, yet feels no doubt, no dismay! The only passage which can seem to sanction the supposition of the weakness of the father's faith is the remark of Jesus, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe;" and yet this is evidently addressed to, or at least refers to others, for it is in the plural, "Except *ye* see, *ye* will not believe;" and our Lord would appear to be contrasting the ready belief of the inhabitants of Sychar with the hardened unbelief of the majority of Galilee. It is true, the Jewish nobleman had not the faith of the Roman centurion, "speak the word only;" and yet how nearly does he approach it, for the moment that word was spoken, "Thy son liveth," he "believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way." Nor during the period of his journey homewards, though it lasted a day and a night, does a single doubt of the Saviour's words appear to have intruded on him. And when as-

sured by his servants that at the very moment Jesus had uttered in Cana the words "thy son liveth," at that very same instant of time the fever in Capernaum left that son, and he lived, I can well join with Bishop Hall, and say, "Behold a double miracle!" for though I cannot add, "with one word does Christ heal two patients, the son of his fever, the father of his unbelief," I can truly say, "with one word Jesus recalls a dying man from the edge of the grave, and a whole household to spiritual life and health."

SECTION XXIII.

(Chapter v. verse 1—6.)

It is unnecessary to take up our time by any attempt to explain to you the way in which these waters of Bethesda conveyed their healing power to the miserable cripple, or the diseased frame—how its influence was limited only to a certain season; and, at that season, not to all the expecting crowds of anxious objects waiting for relief, but to one only, and that one the first who stepped in. I do not indeed think that I could explain it; many explanations have been attempted to be given, but I think we may be as well contented to take it as we find it, and receive it as *the sure word* of Him, who is the truth and the



life, and to believe that it was intended as a gracious type of that fountain, of which the prophet Zechariah predicted that it should be opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. We might as well ask by what process the waters of Jordan had their healing efficacy, and that not at the first washing, but after seven times only, whereby the leprosy of Naaman was cleansed; or through what singular properties the brazen serpent in the wilderness, at one glance alone, became a means of cure. I am content to take it, because God willed it so: it was in His infinite mercy that He caused the waves of Jordan to heal the leper, the brazen serpent to give life to the dying, and now this pool of Bethesda to make whole the sick of whatsoever disease they had: all in their turns types of Jesus, and testifying of that more plenteous redemption, that more abundant mercy, which should give deliverance to him that was diseased with sin, and taken captive of the devil.

Amid then this crowd of helpless objects Jesus was walking, and though no doubt His heart yearned over all, His eye rested on one more helpless than the rest. For thirty and eight years had this impotent man groaned beneath the burden of his heavy affliction, and no man had yet helped him. It was not merely night unto night, nor day unto day, but year after year had passed away *in almost hopeless bondage*, the seasons of youth


and manhood had come and gone, and now, it may be old age had arrived and found him the same miserable object, on which the sun had so long shone; and that which should have drawn forth on his behalf human sympathy and aid, served only to evidence the selfish cruelty of his fellow men. And yet even on this friendless outcast of his race, the eye of Jesus was resting in mercy and in love; so true it is that man's extremity is God's opportunity. Who amid that crowd in the porches of Bethesda could be more lonely, more apparently friendless and forsaken? And had Jesus looked as man looketh, how assuredly would His eye have rested on the busy, bustling, noisy expectant of relief, while the poor outcast, in his unobtrusive silence, would have been passed unheeded and unrelieved. But it was this man, whom Jesus singled out for mercy; and what a lesson of encouragement and hope does it hold out to us! What a proof of the omniscience and loving-kindness of Him with whom we have to do! Jesus saw him, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case! He knows too our case: there is not one among ourselves of whom Jesus does not know far more than you know yourself; far more than your own frail and feeble memory can remember; far more than your own present knowledge of the truth extends. He knows the misery to which sin has reduced us, though perhaps in our blindness we are saying, "who convinceth me of sin?"

What is the world itself, but one vast hospital of sin and suffering, where pitiable objects meet us on every side, where helpless beings, like these sick ones at Bethesda's pool, crowd its porches and its avenues, as unable of themselves, as this poor man, to aid themselves. We are not indeed all alike diseased in body or crippled in frame; the Lord, in His various dispensations of mercy and trial, sends to some a frame unbent by suffering, to others He allots wearisome hours of pain—to some He gives health that knows not a moment's interruption, to others suffering that scarcely knows a moment's ease; but it is not so with the soul—here we are all alike; the same malady and the same helplessness. Have we hastened to that refuge which is set before us, have we earnestly desired to be washed in that fountain, opened for sin and for uncleanness, and in which whosoever washeth is healed of whatsoever disease he hath, yea, is clean every whit. Have we, with this poor man, laid ourselves by the brink of the healing stream, and prayed that, as the angel stirred and troubled the waters of the pool, so might the Holy Spirit descend and move our hearts; that their once calm and placid surface might be troubled by the sight and sense of our sin and danger; that, feeling our own misery and inability to help ourselves, we might cry to Him "whose blood alone cleanseth from all sin."

SECTION XXIV.

(Chapter v. verse 7—9.)

WE left the impotent man with the eye of Jesus resting on him in pity and in love. Happy the man that is in such a case! He thought indeed differently, as regarded himself: "I have no man to put me into the pool," was his melancholy reply to the Saviour's question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" And yet, sad as his destitution was, it was not so sad as the spiritual destitution of him who said, "No man careth for my soul." It certainly is no part of the Lord's purpose in sending us sickness, or suffering, or indeed trials of any kind, that they should render us selfish as regards our own comforts and needs, and indifferent or callous to the wants and claims of others. It was, as some of you remember, the acknowledgment of one, and that a heathen, that "not inexperienced herself in suffering, she had thereby learned to sympathize in another's woe:" and we know how common a remark it is from one sufferer to another, "I am sure *I* can feel for you." I can imagine many a Jew in those porches of Bethesda looking with somewhat of an eye of sympathy and kindred spirit on this poor fellow-sufferer, as he wistfully eyed the yet unmoved waters, and while relief was equally at a distance from both; but the moment *that the ripple* on the waters shewed that the mira-



culous healing influence was at hand, forgetting every plea of another's helplessness, and thoughtful only for self, and the interests of self. One might not wonder so much at this in a Jewish heart of those days : and yet it is very common even among Christians ; and times of danger, times of distress, far more often evidence the selfishness than the self-denial even of the mutually suffering. It is a blessed attribute of our God, that he is unchangeable—"I change not"—and however man may change, Jesus altereth not : He is still in the midst of His people ; and with far more expanding mercy than He ever shewed on earth, He looks not on one alone, but on all, and to each one in this room, even now, He says, "Wilt thou be made whole?" You cannot answer, "I have no man to help me," "No man careth for *my* soul : " for I can tell you of one, ready to heal, and mighty to save—one, whose continual call is, "Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you"—one whose promise is, "Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out."

This narrative is indeed most full of consolation to those who may be suffering under this world's calamities ; to whom sickness, and suffering, and trial may have been sent, and they have thought the trial long and the affliction grievous, and to whose tried and torn hearts the thought (I must add the *sinful thought*) may have suggested itself,

that God hath forsaken them, or forgotten to be gracious. Think of this poor man, lying in his loneliness, unpitied and unaided for so long a portion of human life; and when affliction had wrought its perfect work, when suffering had fulfilled the gracious end for which it was sent, *then* Jesus looked on him, the question, "Wilt thou be made whole," was proposed to him, and the cure was instantly effected. Remember too, that though that cure was delayed for thirty and eight years, though year after year was passed away in almost hopeless despondency, the man still continued waiting, waiting God's time as well as God's way. Jesus found him still lying by the pool's side, silently and uncomplainingly looking for the moment when relief should come: and even though it should not on this side the grave, yet would he still be found within the reach of those means of help, which God might in His mercy bestow upon him. How beautifully expressive of that faith which Job, under even more severe affliction, evidenced, when he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him:" not only though I die, but though He slay me, even when I see His hand lifted up to destroy me, even from that hand will I look for salvation." We may think it strange, concerning any fiery trial that may befall us, as though some strange thing had happened unto us; but the apostle bids us remember that the same afflictions *have been already accomplished in our brethren.*

And I would just add, in connexion with this remark, how sweetly touching, how indicative of that work of grace, which sanctified affliction always produces in the renewed heart, is the comment of that pious but afflicted servant of God, Richard Baxter, on this very incident, "How great a mercy is it," he says, "to live eight and thirty years under God's wholesome discipline! How inexcusable was this man, if he had been proud, or worldly, or careless of his everlasting state! Oh! my God," continues this holy man, "I thank Thee for the like discipline of eight and fifty years. How safe a life is this in comparison with full prosperity and ease!" Relief came at length, when least expected. "Arise and walk," were the life-giving words of power; and he arose and walked, obedient to the will of Him who spake and it was done. Bethesda signifies a "House of mercy;" and blessed be God such places of deliverance are not confined to one spot in one city: it is no longer at one season only, that a heavenly visitant descends with healing on his wings; it is not one, and one only, that finds mercy at His hands, while the rest turn aside in sickening hope. We need no longer thus "limit the Holy One of Israel;" the Gospel invitation to every suffering, sorrowing, sinning one is, "Ho! every one! come ye to the waters."

SECTION XXV.

(Chapter v. verse 10—16.)

THERE is one more valuable and instructive lesson to be gathered from this incident of the impotent man. We left him rejoicing in his cure; the burden of thirty and eight years was at once removed, and he, who for that lengthened period had gone so heavily every day, was now enabled, by the life-giving power and word of Jesus, to mingle with his fellow-men, a healed and restored man. One might perhaps imagine what his feelings would be on such an occasion; but we are not left to conjecture, for we meet with him again. In general it has not been so with those whom Jesus healed; we never hear of them more, after the mercy has been shewn—the boon conferred: they go their way, and are no more seen nor heard of. Scripture draws a veil over their future; the young maiden restored to life, we only meet her in the chamber of death, and as soon as the life-giving mandate, “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise,” had passed the Saviour’s lips, and the spirit had returned to her inanimate frame, we hear no more of her, nor her parents. So it was with the greater number of those whom Jesus healed; and one can easily account why it should be so; it were perhaps more difficult to say why a distinction is made in

any case, or in the present. It cannot be that he alone of all whom Jesus healed was found to return thanks to God in the temple or the synagogue. Many a grateful heart, we cannot doubt, must have offered its thanksgiving there; many a lip must have given utterance to its praises there for the mercies vouchsafed and the blessings bestowed; and yet what this man, and, no doubt, many another healed one, did, may well read us a lesson we should do well to learn and to practise. "Jesus findeth him in the temple." How natural the act, how appropriate the thanksgiving! With the first effort of recovered strength he goes to pour forth the praises of his heart and lips to Him who had dealt thus mercifully with him. How appropriate the transition from the bed of sickness to the temple or the church; how grateful the exchange from the moanings of pain to the hallelujahs of praise! How the Psalmist's feelings gushed over, like a pent-up fountain, when he broke forth into that rich and fervid strain of thanksgiving, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." And with what appropriate blessing was the act rewarded! "Jesus findeth him." He had already found him in Bethesda in his season of

sickness, ignorance, and sin, and even then he knew not the hand that healed; he knew not, nor could even tell the name of Him he supposed his earthly benefactor: but he again findeth Him in the temple, and in that season of thanksgiving Jesus reveals Himself; and the mercy begun at the pool of Bethesda to the body, has its perfect work accomplished to the soul in the house of God.

And I believe that very much of something like this process goes on in many a man's heart under somewhat similar circumstances of sickness and suffering. "Wherefore doth the Lord contend with me?" is very often the cry of one like Ephraim, resisting and "kicking as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;" and though there may be glimpses of the Lord's mercy and tender dealing even in the trial, yet I believe our Lord's own words are found true by most sufferers, "What I do, thou knowest not now;" so dim and indistinct are our earliest conceptions of that Jesus, in whose name we pray for mercy; but you see in this instance, and many more, I doubt not, could every minister's experience declare, and the records of God's book disclose of the fulfilment of that gracious promise, "But thou shalt know hereafter." Oh, what a blessed hour will that be, when the revelation of all the Lord's dealings shall be manifest and clear, when all the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; when sickness *and suffering* shall be found to have been charged

with the Lord's tenderest messages of love and mercy; and when the sufferers, though in this world, it may be, clad in dark and gloomy habiliments, shall, as they come forth from their great tribulation, exchange them for those robes which have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. And even as regards the process on this earth, there is still the fulfilment of that gracious promise, that "if any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine;" that which at first was ill-understood, and but indistinctly comprehended, shall become clear; and he who first learnt to hear of Jesus by the hearing of the ear, shall follow on to know the Lord, and receive Him gladly into the heart, through the channel of heavenly experience.

"Sin no more," was the caution which Jesus in mercy gave to this healed penitent: and how necessary the warning, let the records of many a sick man's chamber tell! Let that chamber testify to the earnest cry for deliverance in the hours of pain and suffering, the apparent bitterness of remorse, the sting of conscience, when memory recalled a life of carelessness and sin, and judgment seemed to be hastening on, the vows and solemn resolutions of amended life and conduct, if God in His mercy would spare! God has heard—He has restored health to their frames, and joy to their dwelling: and what has been in many and *many a melancholy instance*, the result? They

may have gone once, or twice, or even a few times in decency or in shame to the house of God, but they have gradually withdrawn, and become once more entangled in the pleasures and occupations of the world, till they are once more brought to sickness and to sorrow. It is a fearful thing to trifle with God's judgments, but a tenfold more fearful thing is it to trifle with God's mercies. Oh, let not then this history of the impotent man have been recorded in vain, but whilst it shews us the abundant mercy of God in Christ Jesus, may it teach us also not to abuse that mercy, and to sin no more, lest a worse thing happen unto us.

SECTION XXVI.

(Chapter v. verse 17—23.)

WE now enter upon our Lord's defence of His conduct in healing the impotent man on the Sabbath-day. The last verse mentioned not only the exasperated feelings of the Jews towards Jesus, but their malignant and vindictive purposes to slay Him. They not only persecuted, not only exhibited their ill-will, but they actually sought to put Him to death for this work of love and mercy, because done on the Sabbath-day. And it would appear that they had in some measure matured their plans, at least so far as to bring Him before *their assembled council* or Sanhedrim. The line

of defence assumed by our Lord on this occasion is very striking and singular; on other similar occasions He had justified His violation of the Sabbath by appeals to their own reason, as well as their own practices, and arguing, one might almost say, as man with man. But on this present occasion, and before this present assembly He takes far higher ground: He has indeed claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath, and as Lord he claims also the power to supersede even His own appointment, when and how He saw fit. He had indeed, in the beginning, with His Father set apart the Sabbath as a day of rest, and as a memorial of His own cessation from the works of creation, "for without Him was not anything made that was made;" but even that Sabbatic rest involved not, nor implied the suspension of His works of providence or grace. On the Sabbath-day, alike with every other day, His Father and Himself were engaged in those works of providence and mercy, which were needful for the sustenance and preservation of that world He had created. The sun in the heavens, on the Sabbath, stood not still on Gibeon, or any other lofty mountain-peak—nor did the moon stay her course, as inconsistent with her Maker's will. On the Sabbath morn, as well as on any other day, the sun comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoices as a giant to run his course. The grain *too in the earth alike swells beneath the clods, and*

the dews and rains of heaven as much refresh and fertilize the soil on the Sabbath, as God's sun gilds and ripens it. It is the same with the processes of our bodies; the blood flows through its appointed channels with the same regularity; the pulse beats with faster or slower speed, as circumstances require; the same unslumbering Eye is about all our paths, and He sendeth His holy angels on their various errands without any distinction of time, or day, or hour. There is no rest, nor cessation either from love or mercy in the courts or the councils of heaven. "And," adds the blessed Jesus, "as my Father in heaven does, so do I, His Son, on earth now. I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day. As soon might the course of heaven stop, as soon my Father forget to shew mercy and loving kindness, as I forget; He willeth not that any should perish, and I will the same; He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and I claim the same. It is not my Father's will that one of these little ones should perish, nor is it mine; it is His will that I should give unto them eternal life, and, lo! I give it of mine own will as well as of my Father's." The assembled council were too well acquainted with Scripture truth and Scripture phrase to doubt the purport of His words, or misunderstand the meaning He intended to convey. They were well aware that His words implied, that they *claimed no less than perfect equality with the*

Father ; and that He who stood arraigned before them in defence of His life, claimed to be God's own peculiar Son ; not in the sense in which they called, or we might call God our Father, but in a sense which made and identified Himself as equal with God, as Himself God, blessed for ever more.

It was indeed true that Jesus could do nothing of Himself, but what He saw the Father do, nor can He now ; and yet He Himself says the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son ; and, as He adds elsewhere, " All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." And the statements are perfectly consistent, and His own prayer for His disciples intimates the reason, when He prays for them, that " they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee ;" that is, a perfect identity of will, and counsel, and purpose, and love. It is but a poor representation of this, and yet it may help us to understand it, that an earthly son may have such an identity of interest and will with his father, their well-being may be so bound up together, and they may have such union, and communion of purpose and thought between them on every matter, that one could well understand how such a son might reply to any application or request, " If my father wishes it, I shall wish it also ; if he disapprove, I must disapprove also." And yet even in such a case a son might *wish* otherwise, though he might yield to *the father's wishes*, and there would still be ap-

parently the same unity of purpose ; but the unity of will between the eternal Father and the eternal Son, is as the image given back in the faithful mirror, or reflected in the crystal stream—the one the unerring index and representative of the other. The inference which our Lord deduces from this is most conclusive, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father ; and that to detract one jot or tittle from the honour of the Son is in the same measure, and to the same extent to detract from the honour of the Father that sent Him.

SECTION XXVII.

(Chapter v. verse 24—29).

I WISH you especially to take notice of what our Lord says here, and compare it with what an apostle in another place says : “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God ;” and so Jesus here asserts, that “ Whosoever heareth my Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life.” He heareth Christ’s word, and that word by the teaching of the Holy Spirit produces faith, or believing on Him that sent Him, and this issues in everlasting life. The words are even stronger ; they are not merely declaratory of *some ulterior gain, some distant good to be at-*

tained; they are, "he *hath* eternal life," hath it even now—at the very moment that faith springs in the heart of man from hearing and receiving Christ's words into the heart—from that moment everlasting life is begun; it is not merely that the seed has been sown, which may or may not germinate, which may or may not bring forth fruit, but it is a seed indestructible and unfailing: from the very instant that a work of grace is wrought in any heart, the seed is sown and it springs up into everlasting life. And yet, you may say, the man dies: how is this consistent with a present everlasting life, a life that never dies? It may be, you may argue, that a promise for the future is given, and that promise be unfailing, that when man shall have passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death, when his feet are once landed on the heavenly Canaan, then he shall enter on his inheritance of eternal, never-ending life, but that till then he can hardly be said to have everlasting life. And yet the words of the Saviour are, "he hath everlasting life;" even now from the very moment of faith springing up in the heart; and, blessed be God, how consolingly and sweetly true they are, in the explanation which our Lord Himself adds, that "he shall not come into condemnation!" It is not, that *death* hath no more dominion over him, for that penalty must be paid; death hath passed upon all men, "for that all have sinned," but *it is that sin* hath no more dominion over him—

“he hath passed from death unto life”—he is no longer under a dispensation that denounces death, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die;” but he is now under that dispensation which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, “the just shall live by faith;” he has crossed over from the confines of the one to the confines of the other. He is now born of God; and as this same evangelist elsewhere declares, “Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin, for his seed, his new-birth, remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God; and we know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” “This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” “He that hath the Son, hath life.” How the apostle lingers on his theme, as if unwilling to quit so glorious a truth! It is very remarkable and striking that our Lord uses the same imagery and almost the same words to express the two wondrous evidences of the power committed to Him of the Father, in recalling the dead in sin to spiritual life, and the actual dead to actual life at the last day. “They shall hear His voice”—it is the same voice that awakens both—nothing but that almighty voice, which, amid the darkness of chaos, said, “Let there be light, and there was light,” can reach either the *spiritually* or the naturally dead. And what an

idea does this give us of the death of sin, not merely a slumber, from which one's own determination or intention, or the call of another, may arouse us, but so deep, so intense, so utter, that nothing but a sound, like that which shall hereafter startle the slumberers in their graves, can recall the sinner dead in trespasses and sins. It is the same language as before, "He that heareth my word," "they shall hear his voice." So life, as well as faith, cometh by hearing—they shall live, they have everlasting life. There is, however, a very awful difference implied between the two events, "they that hear shall live;" then there are some that shall not hear,—and why? Not because the voice is not uttered, the cry given, but because they will not hear; like the deaf adder, they have stopped their ears, and refused to hear. But when that voice sounds again with the trump of the Archangel, then *all* that are in their graves shall hear, and come forth; there will be no deaf ones in that day and hour, no refusing to hear, no stopping their ears, all alike must hear then, those that would not hear before, that would not have this man to rule over them, must hear and obey now. Though rocks and mountains were to fall on them, and they might think to hide beneath them, that voice would penetrate through all, and reach them: and as the Father hath given to the Son to have life in Himself to dispense to whom *He will, so hath He* assigned to Him au-

thority to execute judgment also: and the same voice that will say to those on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed," will equally say to those on the left, "Depart, ye cursed." It has been well said, "how just is it that they should miss heaven at last, who never seek for heaven till the last! How reasonable is it that God should deny them His grace to repent, who abuse His grace to sin." It will be a sad awakening, if you die naturally, before you begin to live spiritually.

SECTION XXVIII.

(Chapter v. verse 30—38.)

THE Saviour here resumes the argument He had broken off at the 19th verse, but resumes it with still greater emphasis and force. In that former verse He had said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do," here it is, "I can of mine own self do nothing;" so that He who was then pleading before the assembled Sanhedrim or council of his nation, openly avows that He is that Son who has such unity of essence, will and purpose with the Father, that He can do nothing diverse from, or at variance with that Father's will. It was the very purpose for which He came into the world, assumed our nature, and became the man Christ Jesus, and, as *Mediator*, stood between God and man. It was the

very end which was predicted of Him from everlasting, and it was the very purpose which He was not merely content and delighted to do, but straitened till He had done it. "Lo! I come," was His own gracious declaration by the mouth of His servant David. "In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within mine heart." We know how difficult it is to separate self and self-interest from our own actions, or from the judgment we form on the actions of others; how liable we are to be biased by our own wishes or prejudices: it is Jesus alone who can say, "As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just." Yes, it is an awful thought that even the very condemned in the last day will have to acknowledge, "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright in all Thy judgments."

Just recall for one moment before whom this defence was spoken; it was no friendly or admiring assembly hanging on his lips and eager to drink in every word, no enquirers, no seekers after truth, but it was a judicial council of His most determined enemies, convened for the very purpose of condemning Him, thirsting for His blood, and at the very moment plotting His destruction, and, if they hung upon His words, it was only that they might find an occasion against Him. And yet how bold His avowal! how *uncompromising His declaration!* A solitary,

friendless man, in the very centre of His enemies! It is true He appeals to witnesses, but they are no living ones; His own testimony He at once discards, not indeed as of no worth, but as little likely to gain approval of those before whom He spoke. He reminds them therefore of their own enquiries of one whom all acknowledged as a prophet, and who, in the estimation of all, was indeed a burning and a shining light; how he, the prophet and the Baptist, had testified of Him as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, how John had spoken of one that should come after Him, who should baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And, as if that testimony were not sufficient, He points to those miracles of mercy, which none could, and none did deny; as if He had said, in the language of one of their own body, "Can any man do these miracles that I do, except God be with him?" I do not know if Nicodemus were present on this occasion with his brother members of the Sanhedrim; if he were, how must he have hung with reverential awe on every word that fell from the lips of Jesus; and one may well believe that, callous and hardened as might be the hearts of the rest, one at least was open and obedient to the truth. It may be, and I confess I love to think that it was so, that the eye of Jesus rested on him, and the heart of Jesus in its unutterable *love* completed in the Sanhedrim that work of

mercy He had begun, when this timid ruler of the Jews came to Him beneath the shades of night. But be this as it may, there can be no doubt that this defence of Jesus before the council has been recorded by the Holy Spirit for our instruction and admonition. If Jesus spake to them of the witnesses they had in their day, witnesses which left them without excuses, what shall we say of the blaze of light which surrounds us? I would say to you, in the words of Paul, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." At the same time take with you our Lord's caution, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." "Spiritual acts," says one, "require spiritual eyes, and the clearer we see them, the better we perform them." You must not however imagine that you can acquire this spiritual sight by your own efforts; we have need to pray, not only against an evil heart of unbelief, but for a heart to believe. "Unto you," says our Lord to His apostles, "unto you it is *given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." "God *gives*, and then we know; when He opens our eyes, then we can see; when He loosens our tongues, then we can speak; when He says 'Come forth,' we live."

"Without Me ye can do nothing."

SECTION XXIX.

(Chapter v. verse 39—44.)

OUR Lord's exhortation to the Jews to search the Scriptures may, with equal grammatical propriety, be read, "You search," or, "You do search the Scriptures;" asserting a fact which was undoubtedly true, rather than enjoining a precept. The Jews were especially rigid and strict as to the reading of their Scriptures; they were not only read in their synagogues every Sabbath-day—their Scribes were especially appointed to expound those Scriptures to their hearers and make them plain to their understanding, a custom to which our Lord alludes, when He says, "What is spoken in the ear shall be proclaimed on the house-top." And in addition to this, so tenacious were they of their Holy writings, that many of them carried texts of Scripture written on the hems and borders of their garments, and for that purpose made broad their phylacteries. And St. Paul distinctly asserts that there was much of profit every way to them of the circumcision, and chiefly, he adds, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. I do not see, therefore, that our Lord is here exhorting the Jews to search the Scriptures, for that they already did, as He was *warning them* against resting in the mere posses-

sion, or the mere perusal of them : and the rest of the passage I have read seems to bear out this view of the question. It is as if He had said, "You do indeed no doubt search the Scriptures ; they are in your synagogues, in your houses, on your garments, but they are not in your hearts. Those Scriptures contain the title-deeds of your inheritance, for they are they which testify of Me : but the veil is still on your hearts even as you read them, and you heed them not. Though your Law, your prophets, and your Psalms alike foretell My coming, yet now that I am come, ye will not come to Me, though I bring you eternal life. And see to what it leads—with all your self-righteousness, and boasting of yourselves, mine unerring eye readeth the very thoughts of your hearts, and "I know that ye have not the love of God in you. Yet it is for no honour of mine own that I am come : what could all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them add to me? Yet because I come in My Father's name, and seek not glory of men, because I come with no pretensions, no claims of earthly rank or privilege, you receive me not, you despise and reject my mission ; and, in your own vain-glory, seek only such honour as cometh from man—the paltry titles of eminence and distinction that man conferreth on man, in preference to that honour and commendation and approval which cometh from God, and from *God only.*"

The lesson is a very instructive one to ourselves. We are somewhat in the same privileged position as these Jews—we have the Word of God as regularly read in our churches, as they in their synagogues; we have it more abundantly in our houses than they; and though we do not carry its texts about with us on our garments, yet it is so brought home to every one, line by line, that many a one amongst us evidences the zeal with which he has searched the Scriptures, by the facility with which he quotes and appeals to them.

There are, I fear, too many religious professors now-a-days, as in days of yore, who adopt a sort of Scripture phraseology, have set phrases, and peculiarity of idiom, as if a devout heart cared for the shibboleth of sects or parties. It is true that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and if the love of Jesus be uppermost in that heart, it will break forth into language; but, depend upon it, religion is no adoption of a party language any more than a party spirit; it is no more utterance of "Lord, Lord," or cry of "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord," any more than it was, "O Baal, hear us." It seems to me as if, in these our days, more stress is laid upon peculiar views, and abstruse speculations, than on real vital godliness. And I think if our Lord were to come among us, and address us, as He did this assembled Sanhedrim, *He could hardly adopt more appropriate language*

than that which He here uses, "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" More tenacious of a party question, than a Gospel precept; more clinging to, and confident in the out-works of man's creation, than the barriers of God's eternal truth; and combating far more actively for the watch-words of a party than the declarations of God's Word; and more anxious to gain converts to themselves, than win souls to Christ. As for ourselves, we have the Bible in our hands, let us be careful to have its truths written out in our hearts: we search, or at least hear them daily, not to enable us to be fluent in quoting them, or apt in appropriate selection; not to make a vain boast or show of our mere knowledge, but to have the eyes of our understanding enlightened, our affections quickened, and our desires purified, and the whole man more and more wrought and moulded into perfect conformity to the image and will of God.

SECTION XXX.

(Chapter v. verse 45 to the end.)

IN the portion of Scripture which we considered last night, our Lord warned the Jews against *merely reading or possessing* the Scriptures, un-

accompanied by that living faith which would lead them to Jesus. And He instanced its worse than uselessness by their own case, that notwithstanding the freest and the fullest invitations, in the very teeth of the most convincing and irresistible evidence that He was the Son of God, the Saviour that should come into the world, they had refused every offer, and would not come unto Him, even that they might have eternal life; and He now proceeds to set before them the condemnation which awaited them. He might indeed have referred to His own coming into the world, and the testimony, which their rejection of Him would bear against them; He might have said, as he had already said to one of their body, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." But how far more striking and awful are our Lord's present words, that even those very privileges in which they rested and were trusting, the very means of grace and knowledge, which had been already vouchsafed, dim and indistinct and imperfect as they were, were sufficient to condemn them; and that their very Lawgiver and those very Prophets, of whom they boasted, and into whose writings they had even searched, would rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them, for they had alike testified of Jesus. To take in the full force of this declaration of our Lord's, I must remind you again before whom He

uttered it; it was in the presence of those who claimed to sit in Moses' seat, and to whose authority, as teachers of that Law He had given His own sanction, when He said, "All that they bid you observe, that observe and do." And it is not merely *of* these, but *to* these, and in their very presence He declares that Moses and the Prophets would alike condemn them; for though they claimed to be expounders of their Scriptures, and professed to pay great outward deference to the words of their Law, yet in reality they were unbelievers in what they professed to teach. I scarcely know a more fearful passage in Scripture, or one which ought to set us all on a most thorough, searching, and honest examination of our own hearts. Of course these Scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law gave no credit to the words of Jesus, when He told them they did not believe Moses; they might have pointed to their copies of the Scriptures—they might have pointed to their very robes, as they sat in council—they might have appealed to their synagogues and Sabbaths, and the estimation in which they were themselves held by the people, and have enumerated all their good deeds, and thanked God that they were not as other men were. And yet here is the righteous sentence of Him that cannot err, "Think not that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust." I do not deny that *it is a very awakening warning to minis-*

ters and teachers, that even the very truths they teach, the very doctrines they deliver, the lessons of morality and purity and holiness they enjoin, they may practically disbelieve and disregard. I can well tell how much ministers and teachers need not only their own prayers, but the prayers of their people for them, that their own souls may be watered and kept alive by the continual dews of God's Holy Spirit. I well know how painfully apt they are to settle down, as it were, on the lees, on the mere routine of duty, on the unimpassioned, listless, lifeless discharge of a formal service. But though the position of those that sit in Moses' seat needs much grace, that of their hearers needs as much, and we all need to pray that we may be delivered from that evil heart of unbelief which departs from the living God.

There is too another point of most valuable warning I would note here. It is to the Scriptures that Jesus points in justification of their final condemnation—to that Moses who was read in their synagogues every Sabbath-day—it is to the same Scriptures He refers the brethren of the rich man in the parable for their means of deliverance from this condemnation: “they have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them,” and declares that if they would not listen to those means of grace which God had already vouchsafed in His word, if they turned aside in scorn or unbelief from what they already had, every other testimony

be equally valueless and unheeded. And in every Gospel He declares that "the word He spoken, the same shall judge men at the last

"God spake in time past by the mouth of servants Moses and the Prophets, and in these days hath spoken unto us by His Son," and word that Son has spoken, the same shall judge the last day. And yet it is against this very that the puny efforts of man are now directed. Nay, I am wrong in saying, "the puny efforts of man," for it is in reality the gigantic efforts of our adversary the devil, who, knowing his time is short, now rageth furiously, and is making his last and fiercest onslaught on the treasures of God. This, it is true, has long been his favourite battle-ground for many an age; but he has become wiser by experience, and does not now shock us so much by calling the Bible a collection of "idle legends and obscene fables," as he covertly undermines the inspiration of God's Word as a whole; insinuates rather than asserts its truth, and would so filter all through the process of man's reason, as to adapt them to his finite standing, and render them agreeable to the position of his nature. And, as the master of all, to remove all idea, as far as he can, of the hand that moves the machinery of this impotent attempt, his most successful effort has been to throw a doubt even on his own existence and his own doomed abode and that of his

fellow-devils. A devil and a hell are no doubt fearful hindrances in a sinner's creed, and he is too ready to listen to a suggestion that would fain persuade him that the first is only a shadow and an allegory, and the latter altogether incompatible with our ideas of a God of love. Let me earnestly beseech you to be on your guard against such representations; they will meet you in quarters where you least expect them; you will find them in books which bear even an honoured name, and will hear them fall from lips which once seemed touched with a living coal from off God's altar. But to each and all unhesitatingly reply, "Get thee behind me, Satan. It is written, man shall live by *every word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

SECTION XXXI.

(Chapter vi. verse 1—14.)

Matt. xiv. 14—21. Mark vi. 30—44. Luke ix. 10—17.

JOHN does not often record what his brother evangelists have recorded before him; and yet in this present miracle of multiplying a few barley loaves to administer to the wants of an hungry multitude, John adds his own narrative to that of the three preceding evangelists. There can be little doubt that John was mainly led to this for

the purpose of adding the valuable commentary, which our Lord delivered to the Jews on this very miracle: but as he often gives the discourses of Jesus without always introducing the subjects which led to them, I cannot but think that John, with the rest of his brother apostles, must have been peculiarly impressed with this miracle, of which he and they had been eye-witnesses, above even that of many others, which in our estimation would appear more stupendous, such as recalling the dead to life. We are told the effect it had on the multitude, who were the recipients of its bounty, for they had no sooner seen the miracle which supplied every want, and in its fragments far exceeded the original scanty store, than with one heart and voice they exclaimed, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." It was indeed the same Almighty Being, the same bountiful Creator, who had fed their fathers with manna in the wilderness for forty years; and though the pillar of fire and the cloud that led and sheltered them was no longer visible, yet in the present instance the act of creation was performed before their astonished sight; as their own Psalmist had said, "they saw it, and so they marvelled," and they might have added, "this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." And if this be so, as regarded the feelings of apostles, as well as people, there is something very affecting in the *minuteness of detail* with which, now at

the distance of so many years, John records the wondrous theme, shewing how deeply every incident, even to the grass on which the people sat, was engraven on his memory. There is something sweetly touching in this aged man, now almost at the close of his protracted life, recalling with such pathetic interest the details of a scene, which, in his early days, had made such impression on his heart. What a pleasing picture does it give of an old man's memory retracing so accurately the events of one of those days of his youth, which he had spent with Jesus! And what a blessed thing for youth to store up many such remembrances to gladden and cheer old age! Alas, youth too often lays up what can only give bitterness in looking back and retracing! Job speaks of "the iniquities of his youth, David of the "sins" of his, and Jeremiah mourned over the burden of "the reproach of his youth." John, like one of whom he speaks, chose that good part in youth, which in his old age was not taken from him, and which he then delighted to recall.

I do not of course say that this miracle is daily renewed, literally, before our eyes; but something very like it is; and the very regularity, the very certainty of daily food for all God's creatures, is in itself a most miraculous evidence of that mercy which is over all His works. It is not man alone, man in civilized Europe, man amid his cultivated *fields and gardens*, man under his own vine and

his own fig-tree, but it is man everywhere; the savage in his deserts, the Indian in his prairie, the Greenlander amid his icebergs; food to one and all is alike sure, beneath the tropic sun or the frozen zone. It perplexed Balaam to number even Israel, "Who can count the dust of Jacob, or the number of the fourth part of Israel?" but who can count the wild beasts of the field and the forest, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and the countless myriads of insect creation through every grade of existence, and yet our Heavenly Father feedeth them—they all seek their meat from God; and we might truly say that the miracle which made such impression on the astonished multitudes of Galilee is renewed day by day continually, in every land and on every shore.

There is one more remark I would make, which has always struck me as peculiarly grateful, and as most emphatically testifying to the abundant provision which our own loved Church makes for all her children. It is this portion of St. John's gospel which is so appropriately and happily selected as the gospel of the day on the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity, the last Sunday in our ecclesiastical year, the conclusion of that series of collects and portions of Scripture, which our Church in her wisdom and judgment has selected for our banquet throughout the year. We may in truth adopt the language of the prodigal son in recounting *the mercies of his home*, and say, "There is in

our father's house bread enough and to spare," and though it may be one as poor and helpless as the lad we here read of whose scanty means supplied the feast, who deals out the spiritual food, for which our souls may hunger, yet committed into the hands of Him in whose name it is distributed, sanctified by His blessing, and confirmed and sealed by His spirit, it is as effectual to feed the fainting multitude, as though the heavens once more rained down manna, and the clouds distilled their fatness. From Advent Sunday to that which closes our Church's year, there are upwards of fifty Sabbath-days, and on every one of them is the same plentiful provision afforded for the hungering and the thirsting soul ; on every one does Jesus once more give into his ministers' hands the bread of life to distribute among His people : aye, and we may add, for many an age and many a generation, the barrel of meal has never wasted, nor the cruise of oil failed. We too shall go to our graves and another race succeed us, but still, as long as God's Sabbaths shall remain on earth, till they are swallowed up in the everlasting Sabbath of heaven, the word of promise remaineth sure, and the hungry shall be filled with good things. Our churches, in the inscrutable wisdom of God, may crumble into dust, there may remain to us neither ephod nor teraphim, neither priest nor altar ; the outward semblance of worship may *be swept away* ; but still the Church of Christ is

built upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail; and in that imperishable Church shall provision daily be made for them that love the Lord Jesus: still from the unseen temple of many a human heart, shall the melody of prayer and praise ascend to heaven to Him who hath purchased us with His own blood, and return again in richest blessings of spiritual bread and living water, till in the new Jerusalem we need no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. In the services which our Church so beautifully appoints, in the portions of Scripture she so judiciously selects, in the range of prayer, and praise, and spiritual melody, with which she meets her children on every returning Sabbath, you will find that nourishment to your souls, which, through grace sought and given, will carry you through the week rejoicing; and though we be indeed unworthy to gather up even the crumbs which fall from His table, yet He is still the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy, and with the same love and bounty with which He dealt out bread to these hungering multitudes by the sea of Galilee, will He manifest Himself to us, and, with Himself, give us all things richly to enjoy.

SECTION XXXII.

(Chapter vi. verse 15—21.)

Matt. xiv. 22—33. Mark vi. 45—52.

THE incident which the evangelist here records has been already noticed in the preceding Gospels, as regards the facts of the case, and the consolation it affords to the Christian under difficulties in the way of duty. I think however we may derive a very valuable and practical lesson from considering it as the case of one disturbed in conscience, convicted of sin, feeling his guilt, and groaning under the burden, and toiling and struggling for deliverance and peace by unavailing efforts of his own. These disciples, rowing on this stormy sea of Galilee amid the darkness of night, are no unapt illustration of such an one. They had made little or no progress, for hours had they been toiling in rowing, and yet now, far past midnight, they had scarcely rowed more than three or four miles, and were still in the midst of the sea, tossed by the waves and driven by the wind. I do not mean to say that during these anxious hours they thought not of the Master they had left behind, nor that, many and many a time, they had not wished for His protecting power and guidance: but He was not with them, and they no doubt felt in all its force, how different *their own* condition when Jesus was present, and

when He was absent from their side. In the midst of their perplexities and distress, however, when perhaps they little dreamed of succour, and when indeed, humanly speaking, they knew how impossible was His presence or His aid,—at that very moment, in the time of their utmost need, the Saviour comes, manifests Himself to them, is received up into the ship with instant and thankful willingness, and all difficulties are at an end. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. The winds are hushed, the stormy waves subside into a calm, the opposing currents no longer baffle their onward course, but in an instant, and, as I think the expression implies, by a miraculous power, the vessel which, but a moment before, was in the midst of the heaving sea, was at the land, at the very point to which they had been so long and so fruitlessly making their way.

And is not the sinner, when first awakened to a sense of guilt, in somewhat the same condition with these disciples? He feels that he is in danger; a broken law condemns him, his own heart and conscience reiterate the justice of the sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" and one more powerful and more accusing even than his own heart joins in the accusation against him. He would fain flee from the wrath to come, but as yet all is darkness; he sees only the terrors of the violated law, the waves ready to overwhelm him; and he toils and strives to *make peace* with God, to reach the

haven where he would be, by resolutions of future obedience and service. He goes indeed heavily—no light dawns upon him, no comfort, no peace breaks in upon his soul, for Jesus is not yet come: there is as yet no recognition of that merciful provision, that “the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin;” no reception into the soul of that precious, peace-giving truth, that “God can be just, and yet the Justifier of them that believe in Jesus.”

Glimpses of truth may be seen, but so dimly, so indistinctly, like Jesus on the waves, that the poor sinner at first recognizes not the loving One that is mighty to save, but is perhaps more inclined to cry out in terror, “Art thou come to torment me?” or, with Peter, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” He cannot comprehend, he cannot take to himself, to his own comfort, to his own peace, the fulness and freeness of Gospel pardon, and still keeps tossing about on the stormy sea of his own tormenting doubts and fruitless efforts. But it is at this moment of desponding, if not despairing hope, that the voice of Jesus is heard, “It is I, be not afraid,” or as the prophet speaks, “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins;” then it is that Jesus is “received up” into the heart, and He is beheld, clearly and distinctly, “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that were against us, which was contrary to us, taking

it out of the way and nailing it to His cross." Then, but not till then, is the pardoned sinner at peace,—then is he at the land whither he was going, at the haven where he would be: for Jesus is with him, and he has indeed found Him the way, the truth, and the life. I do not say that this is the process with every sinner, any more than I say that the Sea of Galilee was always rough with storms, or that the disciples never crossed it nor sailed upon its waters without hindrance and alarm. Many and many a time, no doubt, they were on its placid bosom, unruffled by a wave, and listening to the voice of Him, who was with them; and so it is not always through the dark waters of terror and doubt that the sinner finds his way. There must be indeed conviction of sin, and loathing of sin, and longing for Jesus, but at the same instant there may be the voice of Jesus heard, "Thy sins be forgiven thee, Go in peace:"

SECTION XXXIII.

Chapter vi. verse 22—27.)

ST. JOHN, you remember, has told us the way in which Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee, and had reached Capernaum, even by walking on the waters; "His way was in the sea, and His path in the deep waters." Wonderful however as the

miracle was, and in an especial manner confirmatory of the divinity of the Saviour, the knowledge of it seems to have been confined to the disciples only: for their consolation and encouragement under difficulties was it intended, for their support under trials, in the way of duty, and at their Master's bidding, was this energy of power displayed. We are not therefore surprized to find that the people, who had seen the disciples depart in their vessel, unaccompanied by their Master, and not aware that He had miraculously crossed the lake, were astonished to miss Jesus: and yet one cannot but admire the truthfulness with which the evangelist mentions that other boats had afterwards arrived from Tiberias, near to the spot where the Lord had been, and in any one of which Jesus might easily have crossed. Truth needs not any concealment, and inspired truth has no dread even of misunderstanding. The miracle of walking on the sea was for the disciples alone, and the evangelist therefore simply notices the wonder of the multitudes at the departure of Jesus, and their own instant crossing of the lake, and hurrying onwards to Capernaum, where the blessed Jesus was already occupied in His wonted task of teaching; and with eager curiosity their first question was, "Master, how camest Thou hither?" Jesus did not gratify their curiosity by answering their enquiry, but with a divine scrutiny of the very secrets of their hearts,

proceeds to lay bare the selfish motives of those hearts; and then, taking, as it were, for His text the miracle He had so lately performed, of feeding their multitudes with a few barley loaves, He gives utterance to some of the most solemn doctrines, and earnest exhortations, which even this Gospel, rich as it is in truth, contains.

How strikingly do the very first words of Jesus evidence that to Him all hearts are open, all desires known, and that from Him no secrets are hidden! To all outward appearance, these seeking multitudes were sincere; the very last words we heard them utter were, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world:" a noble confession indeed, if as sincere as it was true. They had gazed in astonishment as the multiplied food passed along their ranks; and as company after company was fed and satisfied, they might have asked in pious awe, "Whence hath this man bread?" and the natural conclusion would be at once drawn, that no man could do this miracle except God were with him. And now the very first question we find them asking in all seeming reverence is, "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" It is almost like that affectionate remonstrance of His mother, when as a child he stayed behind in Jerusalem, "Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing;" as if they could find no rest till they could say, like the Church of old, "*I have found Him whom my soul*

loveth, I held Him and would not let Him go." And yet how does all this fair show of love and reverence vanish into nothing before the touch of truth: "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." Christ was the avowed object, but self the real end of their actions. But in what sense are we to take our Lord's words, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth?" Are we not to labour for our daily bread, though it perish in the using? Was it not God's doom on fallen man, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread?" Does not an apostle declare that "if a man will not labour neither shall he eat?" and does not the Psalmist add an especial blessing on labour: "Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands; happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee?" This is quite true, and yet there is no inconsistency in these declarations with our Lord's rule, as here laid down: it is, in fact, only what He Himself said on another occasion, "Seek first the kingdom of God." The majority of mankind must labour for their bread, or they would have no bread to eat: there are many things for which we may and must labour and toil; there are many things we may seek after, and for the attainment of which we must rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness; but still, after all, as Jesus said to Martha, "one thing is needful;" and a gracious soul,

like that of Mary, will choose that better part which shall not be taken away. Earthly things must keep their place, and be held subordinate to God. There are many things we may love *beside* God, but there is not one we should love *above* God.

Our Lord here places in striking contrast the perishing nature of the one, and the lasting endurance of the other: and yet, alas! how often is the shadow embraced, while the substance is neglected. It is said that when the Gauls had tasted of the wines of Italy, they asked where the grapes grew, and rested not till they had reached the desired land. And so the soul that has once "tasted how gracious the Lord is," will not rest satisfied till it sees Him as He is: and has learned by its own experience that the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim is better than all the vintage of Abiezer, and that one day spent in the courts of the Lord's house is better than a thousand elsewhere. Is not the gift of God, through Jesus Christ, better than all the laboured gains of earth? It is indeed the gift of Jesus, the purchase of His blood, when He was accepted, and "sealed," and set apart by the Father, as the chosen victim, the unblemished sacrifice, the all-sufficient atonement and propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

SECTION XXXIV.

Chapter vi. verse 28—36.

THE first thing that I would notice in these verses is, that, though undoubtedly "great is the mystery of godliness," yet how simple, how plain, how easy of comprehension is the Gospel! It was a most important question which the Jews here asked of Jesus, though asked in no humble spirit, and with no purpose of obedience, "what shall we do that we may work the works of God." It is, in fact, the whole end and aim of our creation, the very purpose of our being, to work the works of Him that made us; and if we fail in this we fail altogether. Had the question been asked by these Jews in a right mind, and with a proper spirit, how would they have hung upon the answer, and attended to the gracious words that proceeded from the lips of Jesus: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." It was the very answer which the apostle afterwards gave to the enquiring jailer at Philippi,— "What shall I do to be saved?"—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The very simplicity of the way of salvation offended the captious Jews then, as it offends many a proud, haughty, self-righteous, and self-relying spirit now. *In the case of the Philippian jailer, the words fell*

as dew or rain upon a thirsty soil; in the case of these Jews they fell as upon a hard and beaten road. And yet the answer which Jesus here, and His apostle afterwards gave, comprehends in reality the whole of Gospel truth and Gospel privilege. We are not told indeed what Paul on that night of terror, yet of mercy, added to that trembling man at his feet; but we need it not, for here we have from Paul's Master the words of life, and the gracious comments on His own declaration. The Jews in their short-sightedness and blindness compared the miracle they had so lately witnessed with that of which Moses had been the honoured instrument in the wilderness, and evidently meant to depreciate the single, solitary, meal of a few thousands in comparison with the bread and the flesh that had supplied the wants of all the armies of Israel for forty years in the desert. But how immeasurable the difference! their fathers did eat that bread in the wilderness, and yet they all died! even the instrument, the legislator, and his people alike died. Nor was Moses more than the instrument, it was God that showered it down from heaven, and when it had fallen, it was in itself but perishing and corruptible, and if attempted to be preserved, though but for twenty-four hours, it bred worms and stank. How different the true bread, the bread of God, the bread of life, which giveth life, not to the *thousands of Israel only*, but to the whole world,

and of which whosoever ate should never hunger more!

Well might the Jews eagerly ask for that bread, "Lord evermore give us that bread." Oh, had that been indeed the wish of their hearts, had they known of what Jesus spake, they too would have eaten, and been filled with all spiritual fulness in Christ. It is true that when they uttered this wish it was under a misunderstanding of the words of Jesus. Jesus had said that the "bread of God was *that* which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world," no doubt alluding, as He immediately afterwards distinctly explained it, to Himself: but at the moment they supposed He spoke of actual bread, as the woman of Samaria thought He spoke of real water, and as she replied, "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw," so these Jews exclaimed, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Alas! how common, but how sad the mistake, to be serving God only for what He has to give of temporal blessings, or, as one says, to be "loving religion, not for the beauty existing in it, but for the dowry annexed to it." "Ye seek me because of the loaves." Oh! what a reproach, what an evidence of that selfish, self-seeking, time-serving spirit, which seeks and cleaves to God, while the pathway is through green pastures, and beside still waters, but when He would "allure them into the wilderness," though it be but to speak comfort-

ably to them and to bring them peace in the end, they are like these disciples, of whom we read at the close of this chapter, that they went back and walked no more with Him. I do not imagine even of these that they were hypocrites when they first sought Jesus. They, no doubt, in their own estimation, and perhaps actually, were sincere, as far as they went, but they had never searched narrowly into their own hearts, never brought their motives to the light, and so they cried "peace," when there was no peace. I should be sorry, nay, I think I should be unjust, to impute such motives to any amongst ourselves—young hearts are not often hypocritical hearts, but self is as deeply rooted in the young as in the old, though it may not be so prominently developed as at a later age, or at any rate it is more disguised under the light-heartedness of a youthful spirit. But be assured of this, and we all need the caution, that odious as selfishness is in all its phases, there is not one temper so abhorrent to the Spirit of the Gospel, and so at variance with the character and attributes of "Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich."

SECTION XXXV.

(Chapter vi. verse 37—40.)

OUR blessed Lord had said in the preceding chapter that whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise ; and had declared of Himself that He sought not His own will, but the will of the Father which had sent Him. Now, what a blessed, soul-assuring commentary does He give us here on His own words ! He came to do, not His own, but His Father's will, and this is the Father's will, which had sent Him, that of all whom He had given Him, He should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. Again, it was the will of Him that sent Him, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him, should have everlasting life. It is a blessed unity of will between the Father and the Son, a blessed concurrence of purpose. The Father's will is, that of all He has given to the Son not one should be lost, and the Son declares, in perfect unison with this will, that him that cometh unto Him, He would in no wise cast out. What a foundation for a trembling, law-condemned, and self-convicted sinner to rest upon ! what a rock on which to build for eternity, the Father's will, the Son's concurrence ! Well might the apostle, in his triumph, *exclaim*, " who shall lay anything to the charge of

God's elect?" The chosen of God are the given of God, and we can resolve it only into the sovereignty and free grace of God, altogether irrespective of the sinner. "No man can come to Me," saith Jesus, "except the Father draw him:" and how many a sinner, now rejoicing in eternity, has He drawn with the cords of a man, with the bands of love! The Lord represents Himself by His prophet as passing by and seeing man as it were lying in his blood and uncleanness, and in His deep and unutterable pity saying unto him, "Live." He has looked on him in his rags and tatters, and has said, "Take from him the filthy garments," and has clothed him with a change of raiment, even with the robe of His own righteousness, and the ornaments of His grace. He has found him as Jesus found the poor dæmoniac at Gadara, possessed with a legion of evil spirits, and, by the word of his power, he is clothed and in his right mind, and sitting at the feet of Jesus. And can one whom the Father hath drawn and given to the Son, can one whom the Holy Spirit hath sealed and sanctified and made meet for the inheritance, ever perish or be cast out? Impossible: "him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." I would say of the Bible, that as one reads God's word, it is like walking through some lovely garden, where flowers of the fairest hue and the sweetest scent are continually meeting and *attracting us*, and we stop, and gaze, and

admire, and pluck and appropriate as our own, and yet the garden never seems stripped or bare—thousands before us and thousands after us and on every side are doing the same, and still the flowers are as lovely, and as fragrant, and as numerous as ever! But now and then we come to one that strikes us as more beautiful and sweeter than the rest, and we pluck it and wear it in our heart's core, as the most precious of all the flowers that bloom around us: and so I think we may say of this most precious declaration of the blessed Saviour, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out;" that it is, like Him that uttered it, "altogether lovely," "the chiefest among ten thousand." Just observe the thread which binds these precious flowers like "rows of jewels or a chain of gold upon the neck:" "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." "All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me." "Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out." What a glorious triad of sentences! what a cluster of precious truths! "Him that cometh," be he who he may, the feeblest, the weakest, the poorest, the most sin-soiled—be he even like him that lay all night upon the earth and bemoaned his sin—"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; cast me not away from Thy presence, take not Thy Holy Spirit from me:" even to such an one will the message of *love and mercy* be sent, "The Lord hath put

away thy sin." Or be it one, who like her that was a sinner, but came "and stood at the feet of Jesus behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with her tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with ointment;" still to her, though man would have cast her out, there was no casting out in harshness or unkindness, no sending away, no dismissal, no refusal. "Jesus said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven, go in peace."

I need hardly say to you that, like most of the other promises of Scripture, it has however a precept closely connected with it. Who is it that Jesus will not cast out? Him that cometh to Him. Then those that stay away have no interest in the promise; those that go elsewhere, or return a contemptuous answer to His message, "We will not have this man to rule over us,"—they that accept not Jesus in all His offices, as Prophet to teach, as Priest to atone, and as King to rule,—for whom Christ in the love of His heart, and Christ in the power of His arm, is not the rock on which they have built for eternity—that stand aloof in their pride and self-righteousness, and go not as poor, perishing, famishing sinners with the beggar's plea and the rebel's doom—these must not wonder if they are cast out; and the same Jesus whose lips uttered this precious promise, "Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out," *has* as clearly told where the

impenitent and the unbelieving shall be cast, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

SECTION XXXVI.

(Chapter vi. verse 41—51.)

I do not know a more important truth than that which is here uttered by Jesus, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." It explains and unravels so much that is perplexing, if not unintelligible—it accounts for that unbelief which was so prevalent among the Jews, and at once gives a clue to that murmuring against Jesus for those precious truths He had given utterance to. The veil was still on their hearts; they saw Jesus as He was outwardly, in human guise like themselves; His earthly lineage, as far as they cared or sought to know, was no mystery nor secret, its very meanness and its deep poverty were never concealed. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" was their scornful cry. Was He not simply Jesus, or Joshua, the son of Joseph, the carpenter, of Nazareth? Did He not walk among them as any other man? Was He not an hungered, and thirsted, and wearied as other men? And yet He now claimed to be that true and living bread, the bread of God, the bread of life which

came down from heaven, of which the manna in the wilderness was but an imperfect type, for their fathers, who had eaten of that, had all died; but if a man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. They were offended and murmured at Him. And yet He *was* all that He claimed—equal with God; nay, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God blessed for evermore. But they knew Him not, they recognized Him not; the veil was alike upon their vision and their hearts, and they came not to Jesus with the confession of Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And why did they not? because the Father drew them not. They saw the miracles which Jesus wrought, they heard the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and the invitations of love and mercy addressed to them as well as His disciples, and yet, seeing, they perceived not, and, hearing, they did not understand. Wrapt up in their own righteousness, and confident in their own privileges as children of Abraham, they turned a deaf ear to the promises and invitations of the Gospel.

I know there is a question ready to be asked, sometimes it may be in a humble, but far oftener in a captious and a sceptic spirit,—“Why did not the Father draw them?” and could that be justly charged to their account as sin, which seems in some measure not left to their own control? “No man can come, unless the Father draw;” the Father did not *draw*; is man then chargeable with

this as sin? With regard to the first question, why did not the Father draw them? I might be content to answer, and you to hear, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." But I read in my Bible that "God would have," is willing, nay, wishes "all men to be saved;" that "He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked," and that He asks, as if in sorrow and surprise, of those that are perishing, "why will you die?" I am therefore sure that it is from no irreversible decree of God that any perish; that He useth every means, "line upon line, precept upon precept," "sending unto them" continually "prophets and wise men," message after message, delaying the execution of His righteous sentence year after year, "slow to anger, and longsuffering, and keeping mercy for thousands," listening to the intercession of His beloved Son, "Let it alone this year also," and "not willing that any should perish." It was so assuredly in the case of these very Jews to whom our Lord was now speaking; "last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying, surely they will reverence my Son." It shewed the purpose of His heart, the yearning of His love towards them; nor was it till they were left "without excuse," that the sentence went forth, "My spirit shall not always strive with man," "let them alone," "cut them down." I know we might pursue this question into all the mazes and mysteries of God's secret things; but I presume not

to tread on such holy ground, or to seek to understand those things which belong unto the Lord our God, and which He will not reveal nor make manifest, till the great day of the revelation of the righteous judgments of God. I know the Almighty could have drawn these hardened Jews, and He did not, as He could now draw every obdurate sinner, and He does not: but let us just exercise a little common sense in this matter, for common sense has really a great deal to do in our understanding it. "God's ways," it is true, "are not our ways," but man's ways and man's rule are very much moulded after God's. Suppose one dear to us—a child dear to a parent, goes afar, forgets the covenant engagement of his youth, and, like one of whom we have read, spends his time and his father's substance in riotous living: he is not cast off at once, and driven in disgrace from his father's door. Message after message is sent to assure him of a parent's continued love and readiness to forgive, and to urge his return; but he goes further astray, each intelligence that reaches home, only brings tidings of greater estrangement, and deeper guilt and degradation. He is in want, and those wants are perhaps relieved in secret; means are sent him from some hidden source, though he might perhaps guess whose undying love alone could supply his need: but the heart becomes more callous, more alienated, more lost to every feeling of affection or

remembrance, of remorse or shame. Do we then wonder that at length, every means abortive, every endeavour abused, and every effort exhausted, he is left to his own ways: and that his father, though he may go mourning for him all his days, and his grey hairs go down to the grave in sorrow, will henceforth forbid that child's name to be mentioned in his father's house? But do we for one moment dream that that father loved not his son, that his efforts lasted not to the very uttermost of human forbearance, and his love endured to the close? far less can we imagine for an instant that the father desired that son should perish; and that, with some secret purpose in his own heart, he trained him up to ruin? And can we think that the yearnings of God's heart, the purposes of God's love, and the emotions of God's sorrow are less tender, less strong than man's? Hear His own inimitable words: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee, as Admah? how shall I set thee, as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." If then the sinner perish, it is not God's decree, nor God's purpose, nor will; it is his own obduracy, his own infatuation, his own work. "No man can come to Jesus except the Father draw him;" but that Father's heart is yearning over, and His voice crying to every sinner, "Turn ye, turn ye from *your* evil ways, for why will you die?" and He

has moreover promised to give the Holy Spirit to every one that asketh Him.

SECTION XXXVII.

(Chapter vi. verse 52—65.)

As the Jews understood our Lord's words literally, it was a very natural question which they asked among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They saw its absurdity at once, and reasoned on its impossibility. And yet, thirteen hundred years afterwards, a very large body of Christians adopted this very absurdity, and made it an imperative article of their creed. What these Jews, in their ignorance and error, would have charged on Jesus as His meaning, and what they derided not merely as an absurdity, but as an impossibility, a portion of the Christian church has bound with a chain of iron on the consciences of her members as an article of their faith. The Roman Catholics found their doctrine of transubstantiation mainly on this 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel; and it is an evidence that the veil is on their hearts as effectually as on the Jews, though in a different sense. The Jews were too shrewd to understand our Lord's words literally, and could not comprehend them spiritually,

and as they rejected them in the one sense, they equally rejected them in the other,—and therefore fell short of eternal life. The Roman Catholics understand them literally, and therefore lose sight of their spiritual application : and though they do not, as the Jews, reject both meanings, their error is as fatal and ruinous as that of the Jews. It is true that when these Jews, to whom our Lord was addressing His discourse, argued on its impossibility, Jesus was standing before them, a living man ; and if, as they conceived, He spake literally of giving them His flesh to eat, they might well argue on its absurdity also ; but Jesus is now in heaven, and, according to Papal doctrine, it may be that that body, which He assumed on earth, is left behind to supply the food and nourishment of His people, till He come again. And yet, when Jesus Himself, on the first celebration of the supper, gave the sacramental bread to His disciples, and invited them to eat, with the assurance that it was His body, those disciples, had they taken their Master's words literally, must have believed the very absurdity which their countrymen here ridiculed—that Jesus, even while He sat before them, while His lips were speaking the words, and His hands handling the element of bread, was actually offering them His flesh to eat, and His blood to drink. It may be unnecessary to pursue the subject further, but there is one argument which

has always suggested itself to my own mind as irresistible, and which I am not aware that I have ever seen insisted on.

The Lord, we know, has ever worked with the utmost economy of miracle—He has never allowed the usual course of nature to be diverted in any one of the created agents of His will, but for all-important purposes and the very moment those purposes have been answered, the deviation has ceased; the miracle not merely suspended, but utterly at an end. Did the sun stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon at the bidding of the captain of the hosts of Israel?—“There was no day like that before or after it.” Even the very manna, to which our Lord so pointedly alludes in this chapter, ceased when it had fulfilled its mission: it was indeed a succession of miraculous agencies, but no perpetuity of them. “On the very morrow of the day on which the Israelites had eaten of the old corn of the land, the manna ceased, neither had the children of Israel manna any more;” and so we might say of every miracle throughout the Bible. But now let us look at this miracle of transubstantiation.* Though it was not till the thirteenth century that it was imposed as an article of faith by the Papal church, the miracle must have been in operation from the first; the creative power must have resided

* Transubstantiation was first suggested in the 9th century, but it was *not formally asserted* till the Council of Lateran, A.D. 1215.

in the priesthood from the beginning; and therefore, for more than eighteen hundred years has this miracle been in exercise, though for thirteen hundred of those years, they knew not the operation of their own hands. But is this all? Look, not at the economy, but at the prodigality of this miracle—it is in the hands of every priest of the Romish Church, be he infidel or profligate, be he saint or sinner, of whatever rank or order, the lowest as well as the highest; be he but a legitimately ordained priest of the Romish Church, to each and every one is alike delegated the miraculous creation of the real body of the Lord. In the east and in the west, in the north and in the south, from the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn, from the Arctic to the Antarctic circle, the same victim and the same body is created and offered on every altar. But is the prodigality of the miracle confined to this? far from it—in every wafer there is a fresh God, an entire God, a whole and undivided God, so that in reality at every celebration of the mass, the priest creates Gods many and Lords many. Each worshipper swallows a whole God; if it were not so, if each wafer contained only a portion of the Saviour, and the whole mass formed the whole Saviour, we should perhaps have the contention of the members, as so graphically sketched by the Apostle, and he who had the foot might envy the recipient of the head. *But it is not so*—each wafer is an undivided body;

and there are therefore at the same moment, here and there, and everywhere, Saviours, like the seed of Abraham, innumerable as the stars in heaven, or the sand upon the sea-shore. Surely we may say of the prodigality of such a miracle, that it is indeed good measure, pressed down and running over, which the Church of Rome vouchsafes, or rather forces on her members; and I should fear that the result would be to realize most fearfully the proverb, "A full soul loatheth the honey-comb," and that instead of the blessedness of the banquet, where "the banner over us is love," there is either the repulsiveness of infidelity, which disbelieves the matter altogether, or that superstitious dread, which nullifies and renders void the blessing.

I have before remarked on the singular, I might almost say judicial infelicity, with which the Roman Catholic quotes Scripture, and this 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel is no exception to the remark—for our Lord, with prophetic anticipation, at once meets this very doctrine of theirs, and directly asserts that such a literal interpretation of His words would be of no avail, that even if it were a truth, it would be a profitless truth; and Scripture assuredly never deals in such: "It is," He says, "the spirit that quickeneth, *the flesh profiteth nothing*: the words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life."

SECTION XXXVIII.

(Chapter vi. verse 66 to the end).

Matt. xvi. 13—28. Mark. viii. 27—38. Luke ix. 18—27.

How true is the declaration of the apostle that the preachers of the Word are a savour of death unto death to some, and a savour of life unto life to others. It was so even with the preaching of Him who spake as never man spake: even this most solemn discourse, and these most precious truths and assurances which it disclosed and revealed, were an offence to the larger part of those who heard them. But, alas! how sad their condition! It was indeed death unto death; it was no temporary offence, no transient displeasure, not even a galling truth, which caused them to go back: they had been His disciples, they had seen His miracles and His power, and perhaps had calculated on His immediate shewing unto Israel, and their own participation in His earthly grandeur and power. They now saw their mistake; they perceived that He held out no promises of the kind they looked for; and the disappointment of their worldly hopes soon damped the little zeal they had felt for Jesus. How short-lived is that affection which is based upon self-interest; how transient is that zeal which is fed only by self-*emolument*! It would however hardly do to avow *a disappointment* such as theirs, and therefore

they pretend to charge upon the doctrines of the Gospel, what was in reality the result of their own carnal views and disappointed desires. They allege that the "hard sayings" of Jesus were the stumbling block; that His preaching, and not their hearts, was the hindrance; and that they could not understand a teacher so mysterious and vague.

It is the same now: it is the self-denying precepts of the Gospel, the heart-searching purity, and comprehensive character of the law of God that offends many, and causes them to call it an hard saying; and persons just as much draw back now from the Gospel ministry, not because it is unintelligible, but because it is too plain and uncompromising.

There was no doubt sorrow in the heart of Jesus when He asked His other disciples in such simply touching words, "Will ye also go away?" Peter indeed repudiates the idea as an impossibility, and in his reply adopts the very words of his Master, as the language of his confession, which had already given such offence to many. "The words that I speak unto you," said Jesus, "they are life." "Thou hast the words of eternal life," is Peter's acknowledgment and confession. Yet was there not room for questioning even their faith, the faith even of the chosen twelve? Was there not among their band one whose heart, even at that *moment*, was not right with God, and

who, though amongst them, was not of them, and had neither part nor lot in the matter? nay, would not even Peter himself deny Him before men, whom he now confessed and acknowledged to have the words of eternal life? It is a solemn thought that the vast majority of those who listened to the words of Jesus rejected the truths He taught, and, with them, eternal life: and that of the few, the scanty few, who drew not back, but adhered in all apparent fidelity to their Master, one even then was an hypocrite, and, ere long, would be an apostate and a suicide. How strikingly does all this illustrate our Lord's saying, that "No man cometh unto Me except the Father draw him." It is a divine work on the heart alone, and the instant unhesitating answer of that heart to the Lord's call, is, "When Thou saidst 'Seek ye my face,' *my heart said*, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'"

I fear that a feeling often crosses the mind of many, it may perhaps some of yours, I know it has mine, in former years of darkness and ignorance, that to believe in Christ was not only simple, but extremely easy. Yet these Jews assuredly found it no easy matter. You will perhaps say their prejudices were *against* Jesus, ours are *for* Him, but I believe the evil principle of unbelief is alike strong in both; and at the time that our Lord uttered this discourse, their feelings were all *enlisted in His favour*. They were the very per-

sons who, but the day before, had witnessed the miracle of feeding the multitude on a few barley loaves; nay, had themselves eaten of the food thus miraculously supplied, and had even acknowledged the heaven-sent mission of Him who had wrought the act. And yet, within four and twenty hours, we find these very men demanding a fresh sign of His commission and authority: "What sign shewest Thou? that we may see and believe." No! be assured it is no easy work to believe in Jesus—it is no work which you or I or any one can do of his own will and determination—it is no mere work of the understanding; no assent to well-known and undisputed facts; it is a cordial acceptance of all the terms of the Gospel, an humbling acknowledgment that without it we must without doubt perish everlastingly, a lying low in the dust before God as poor sinners, a looking unto Jesus, as the bitten Israelite looked to the uplifted serpent of brass. In a word, faith is the work of the Holy Spirit of God, His taking of the things of Jesus and shewing them unto us. I do not deny that there are deep mysteries in religion, there are many such in this chapter—many things above our comprehension, but none contrary to our understanding; nor indeed, would I say, are there any "hard sayings"—hard they may be to flesh and blood, and repulsive to the natural understanding. If the precept was enjoined on such, "If thine hand or thy foot offend thee, cut

it off; if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out;" one would not wonder to hear from the natural man, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" but to the renewed spirit, to him into whose heart the love of God has been shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, and whom therefore the love of Christ constraineth, were Jesus to say, "I will shew thee harder things than these," the instant reply would be, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

"Sweet in the confidence of faith,
To trust His firm decrees;
Sweet to lie passive in His hand,
And know no will but His."

TOPLADY.


SECTION XXXIX.

(Chapter vii. verse 1—13.)

Luke ix. 51.

WE read in the beginning of this chapter to what a melancholy extent unbelief in Christ had spread itself—how it had stirred up, not merely malignity and hostility throughout Jewry against the holy Jesus, but had tainted also the natural channels of domestic kindred and love. It is a very painful illustration of the truth of our Lord's

own remark, that "a prophet is not honoured in his own country," nor, we may add, in his own house either. It was assuredly so with Him that should come into the world: "Neither did His brethren believe on Him." "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." I do not however imagine that it is here meant so much that His brethren discredited His divine mission or disbelieved His miracles, the evidence of their own senses, as that they were, with so many others, strangely misled by their own carnal views, and were, equally with the rest, offended with those sayings, which seemed to imply the spiritual nature of His kingdom, and which they either could not or would not understand. I would rather suppose from the tenour of our Lord's reply that there was impatience rather than incredulity, perhaps a mixture of both, and that they were eager to share in those temporal advantages and distinctions which they expected would ensue on His recognition as the Deliverer of Israel; and that for this reason they would urge Him on to a more distinct display of His power and avowal of His claims. They represented Galilee as comparatively a mean and insignificant district, and were anxious that the wider and more important theatre of Judæa and Jerusalem should be the scene of His mighty works; and they insinuated that His continuing "in secret" in the seclusion of Galilee implied as if He were *unwilling* to bring His preten-

sions to the proof of public scrutiny. We may however gather some very useful instruction for ourselves and our own guidance from this conduct of our Lord's "brethren" on this occasion. It certainly represents them in a very unamiable light. There can be no doubt that there was great ignorance, great unkindness, an almost wilful blindness, and consequently an ungenerous perversion and misconstruction both of our Lord's words and actions, as well as motives, on the part of those from whom, humanly speaking, He might have looked for encouragement and support. It teaches us that we should be very careful how we impute motives to any one's conduct, especially motives that are uncharitable or unkind. We cannot read any one's heart, nor detect the secret springs of action : much that may seem unintelligible and erroneous to us, may be very easy of explanation, and charity therefore should think no evil. Especially should we be on our guard against ascribing to wrong motives the conduct of a truly godly person ; of one whom we believe and feel to be influenced by religion, and who professes to hold himself accountable to higher and more searching scrutiny than man's, for every action of his life. But what I wish to guard you against is, not merely a censorious spirit, imputing wrong motives where charity would suggest a kind one, or going out of our way to say an unkind thing, even though founded
 truth, when the law of love would rather prompt

to be silent altogether ; I would remark also from the passage before us, how different are the motives which influence a really religious and conscientious man from what the world gives him credit for. It is sad and most painful too when those of one's own household and kindred are the unkind and uncharitable assailants of our conduct ; and yet Jesus has forewarned His disciples that it would be so. Many a young convert, struggling with the first convictions of Gospel truth, opening his heart to the first call of Gospel love, and beginning to separate himself more widely from the world and the world's pleasures, and to seek to know more of Jesus, has had the most painful ordeal to undergo in his own family and from his own kindred. Many a brother has unkindly sneered at a sister, and a sister at a brother ; and what is more painful still, even parents, fathers and mothers, have been found to thwart and oppose the noblest aspirations of a child's young heart. They have assigned every motive for the change they dislike but the right one—they have tried every weapon, have reviled, have jeered, have goaded, have threatened,—and all but cast out.

Let us turn for a moment to the 6th verse : “ *My time* is not yet come ; *your time* is always ready.” How true ! how consolingly supporting under the trials, anxieties, and suspense of life, and the delays and disappointments which so often meet us in *our pilgrimage*. Like God's ways and


God's thoughts, God's times are also very different from man's. We are always eager, impatient, impetuous, querulous under disappointment, murmuring at delay, almost questioning *with* God, and complaining *of* God. It has been always so; even "Moses, the man of God," in his distress, said, "Return, O Lord, how long? let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants." And in another Psalm it is said, "How long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever?" Aye, and even those who have put off the burden of the flesh, and, though "slain for the Word of God, and the testimony which they held" are yet safely housed beneath God's altar, even they wondering and, it may be, impatient at the long-suffering of God, exclaim, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" What an answer of peace and of authority to still every rising thought of impatience, "My time is not yet come." "Be still, and know that I am God." "I am God, and not man." And when, after His resurrection, His disciples asked Him, in the still lingering spirit and clinging hopes of these brethren, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"—it was a very striking answer which the risen Saviour gave, "It is not for you to know the times nor the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." More than eighteen hundred years have passed away since Jesus spoke those words, and

still may Israel say of her deliverance and her kingdom, "God's time is not yet come." She has been looking and longing intently for it, more than they that watch for the morning light. Amid the darkness of her captivity and from the very depths of her bondage, she has been lifting up her head and crying, "Watchman, what of the morning? Watchman, what of the morning?" and there has been none that answered, nor any that regarded. Like those beneath the altar, lying as she has been for eighteen centuries "among the pots" and the furnaces of her worse than Egyptian thralldom, she too has been crying out, "How long, O Lord, how long?" and God's time is not yet come. But the morning breaketh, the first streaks of light are seen on the tops of the hills round about Jerusalem—the name of Jesus is now pronounced in her streets with honour, and His worshippers acknowledged where His blood was shed. "Lift up your heads," O ye sons of Jacob, for "your redemption draweth nigh." Weep no more for yourselves or for your children, Oh daughters of Jerusalem, but rather rejoice and be exceeding glad, for your King cometh, yea, is nigh at hand, bringing salvation unto Israel, and peace unto Jerusalem.

SECTION XL.

(Chapter vii. verse 14—31.)

THE progress of this chapter plainly shews us that however little might be the estimation in which Jesus was held in Galilee, in His own country, where His manner of life from His youth up was well known, He was not in any degree in greater repute in Jerusalem. The learned Scribes and Rabbis, and haughty Pharisees, contemptuously turned aside from one whom they looked upon as illiterate; and though some among them might marvel at the power, and authority, and influence, with which Jesus spoke, yet still, referring all to natural causes, their wonder was the more excited at such results from the teaching of one, who, according to their notions, was altogether uneducated; and they were far more anxious to display their superiority in criticising His want of learning, than in profiting by the holy lessons He taught or the truths He delivered. I suspect a great deal of similar feeling has existed in all ages, and certainly does exist at the present day. We are all too ready to yield to the celebrity of a name, or the rank of an individual; and even pretension, without a claim, if boldly advanced, has its advocates and

 I know that a great many allege want of

scholarship as a reason why they are not religious, which is about as valid a reason as if they urged it as an exemption from their daily labour; but a great many put forward scholarship, as if religion consisted in "knowing letters," and look down on the unlettered Christian, whose teaching has never been of man, or in man's schools. I would not for one moment, you may be sure, uphold ignorance as in any sense preferable to knowledge; but I have known and honoured those whom the world might indeed despise as unlettered men, but who had been undoubtedly taught of God that true and saving knowledge which is essential to all, and without which the path to heaven can never be trod by any. And an apostle, even Paul, has declared that a man may have a vast amount of learning and knowledge, and many even noble gifts, and eminent attainments, and yet, lacking one thing, be "nothing." I am very far from saying, too, that every teacher is necessarily superior to those he teaches, especially as regards religious truth: both teacher and learner are alike taught in the same school; have, as it were, the same elements of instruction, and the same Instructor; and it may and often does happen that the learner is the more diligent seeker after truth, the more humble enquirer after "hid knowledge," and the more prayerful in his meditations. It was so with David, and it was in no proud boast that he *declared of himself*, "I have more under-

standing than all my teachers, for," he immediately adds, "Thy testimonies are my meditation," and "through thy precepts I get understanding. Depend upon it he is the best student in divinity that studies most upon his knees.* Our Lord however here adds a most important caution, as well as blessed truth, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;" and what a comment are David's words on this declaration, "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep Thy word." One way of sin habitually walked in is not only a hindrance, but a barrier against truth; one grain of insincerity, or want of singleness of heart in the pursuit of religious truth will taint and mar the whole.

It is sad to think with what tenacity these Jews clung to their old charge of breaking the Sabbath, against Jesus. One whole year had passed since He had healed the poor impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and had effectually refuted the charge before the Sanhedrim, yet they now again revert to the accusation. Malice never grows old, and is never satisfied till it has wreaked its full vengeance; and no doubt the boldness of Jesus in exposing the murderous wishes of their hearts, tended only to exasperate their malice, "Why go ye about to kill me?" Men often feel most bitterly the exposure of a thought, which they feel

* Bene orâsse est bene studuisse.

no shame in indulging in the secrecy of their hearts. It is not the sin, but the shame, which galls; and it was so with these Jews, and they could not restrain their angry rage from breaking out into the coarsest and rudest invective, "Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill Thee?" I do not deny that it was very probable that many of those who were then assembled at Jerusalem knew neither the purpose nor the wishes of these men: others assuredly did, for they were astonished at the boldness of Jesus under the circumstances, and asked, "Is not this He whom they seek to kill?" but I cannot but think that this rude expression, "Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill Thee?" was far more likely to be the insolent evasion of their own purpose, by those who really meditated the deed, rather than an expression of surprise by those who were altogether unconscious of the design.

These Jews indeed had marvelled at Jesus, looking upon Him as an illiterate man, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" Contempt of others is not merely accompanied by, it is generally founded on, an arrogant conceit of our own superior attainments; and so we find these Jews no exceptions, presuming on their own knowledge, and grounding their rejection of Christ on that very knowledge. "As for this man, we know whence he is; but when Christ cometh, no *man* knoweth whence He is." Two

more ignorant assertions could hardly have met together in the same speech; and our Lord I think meant to intimate this in His reply, though our version gives a different meaning to His words, which should be read interrogatively, "Do ye indeed know Me, and know whence I am? I am not come of Myself, and ye know not Him that sent Me." The inference is plain—If ye know not Him that sent, do ye, can ye, know Him that is sent? and this is in fact all but word for word what our Lord does, say in the next chapter: "Ye neither know Me, nor My Father: if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also." I would charge you then to remember what our Lord says in this very Gospel, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

SECTION XLI.

(Chapter vii. verse 32—36.)

It was but a little while that Jesus had to remain in this world. His mission was nearly accomplished, the work that His Father had given Him to do was nearly done, and He was shortly to return to the bosom of that Father whom He *had left*. There is something very touching in the

words which Jesus here addresses to the Jews, "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent Me." The Jews indeed misunderstood His meaning, and little thought of the fearful and sad alternative which it placed before them : that the privileges, which were now vouchsafed, would soon be withdrawn ; the voice they had so long heard in their streets, their temple, and their synagogues, would be no more heard among them ; the power which had so long dwelt among them with divine commission to heal their sick and suffering ones, would be no more present ; that the teaching of Him who taught far beyond what Scribe or Pharisee could teach, would so soon be at an end. They would indeed seek Him, but to no purpose ; they would call, but He would not answer ; they would stretch out their hands, but He would not regard. They understood not however anything of this ; they thought that Jesus had uttered these words in mere pique and displeasure at their little heeding of Him, and that all He meant was to transfer His teaching to the despised Gentiles.

But is not this same warning equally addressed to us ? Is it not true of you, and me, and each, that the invitations of Jesus will be addressed to us but a little while longer ; that mercy will strive against judgment but a short time more, and then all will be at an end.

"Yet a *little while* am I with you," saith the

Saviour; the time is fast drawing nigh, when the privileges of Christian Sabbaths and Christian ordinances, and these our social meetings for domestic worship will be no more: and when earthly sabbaths are ended, and human ordinances closed, shall we be able to say with Jesus, "I shall return to Him that sent me, to Him that gave me being, that where He is, there I may be also?" It is this very purpose for which Sabbaths are appointed, and ordinances vouchsafed, that we may work the work, and do the will of God: it was for this very end that Jesus came into the world, to save sinners, and yet these sinners of Jerusalem, almost to a man, rejected Him; and that which should have been unto them a means of grace, was, through their impenitency and obduracy an occasion of a still greater stumbling, and a still higher rock of offence. And will not Christian privileges, if abused or slighted, be the same to us? Jesus will not plead for ever; His voice is indeed now saying to every sinner, "Come unto me;" but ere long that voice will say, "Depart from me." It is a fearful doom which Jesus here assigns to such,—“Ye shall seek me, but shall not find me.” Oh! if we could but know the vain and fruitful wishes, the earnest but un-availing cries, which resound through the vaults of hell, we should better understand the mournful meaning of our Lord's words. One such cry is left on record,—“Father Abraham! have mercy on

me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." And the inability of Abraham or any departed or canonized saint to save is recorded also; and the impassable gulf, which lies between the spirits of the saved and the spirits of the damned, is mentioned also; that, whatever might be the earnest desires, the agonizing longings of the one or the other, they cannot pass it, neither the one to save, nor the other to be plucked as a brand out of the burning. "Yet a little while"—it sounds like that final intimation of God to the unbelieving and impenitent generation over whom the deluge was suspended: "yet seven days." And yet to us will come the same; there must come, not merely the last seven days, the last week of life, but the last day and the last hour. Were God to say to any living being, "Yet seven days and thy soul shall be required of thee," one might think that if ever that man were serious in his life, that last week of existence would be a week of deep solemnity and earnest preparation; and yet in many an instance it is not, and it would not be so. Many a criminal who has known the day, and the hour, and the very mode of his departure out of life with all its horrible publicity and shame, has hardened his heart to the very last. In the days of Noe, in the days of Lot, it was the same; and these very Jews to whom Jesus was speaking *these awful words*, not only disre-

garded them at the time, but continued to disregard them till the measure of their iniquities was filled up, and Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles.

SECTION XLII.

(Chapter vii. verse 37—39).

It has been frequently remarked that our blessed Lord drew many an illustration of His doctrines and His precepts from objects, not merely familiar to His hearers, but immediately presenting themselves before His own and His hearers' eyes; and He pursues the same course here. On the last day of this feast of the tabernacles, there was, according to the Mosaic Law, "an holy convocation," when an especial offering by fire, or sacrifice, was appointed for the day. It does not appear that Moses commanded any offering or pouring out of water on that day as well, but it seems to have been a graceful and appropriate addition to the ceremonies of the day, continued too to our Lord's time, to bring water in solemn procession from the fountain or pool of Siloam in golden vessels, and pour it upon the altar before the Lord, in grateful commemoration of the water so abundantly, and so miraculously supplied to *their fathers* in the wilderness. It no doubt

brought vividly to their mind that period, as described by their own Psalmist, when their fathers "wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way, and their soul fainted in them, and in their trouble they cried unto the Lord, and He delivered them out of their distresses." It was in beautiful illustration of this, that Jesus now stood forth in the midst, and said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." Are your souls thirsting after righteousness, as your fathers thirsted for water in the desert?" Are you needing strength and refreshment for the way as they did? Are you ready to faint by reason of your burdens as they were? Then, "Come unto Me." "If any man thirst," be he who he may, even those who have been thirsting for My blood, who have even now sent officers to sieze Me, if they will but forsake their ways and their unrighteous thoughts, and are now thirsting for the waters that I shall give him, "Let him come unto Me, and drink." The same Being that bade the rock gush forth with streams of water in the wilderness, nay, the Rock itself, is here, and that Rock is Christ.

There is no image so frequently made use of in Scripture, to denote the preciousness of Gospel truth, and the effects of Gospel knowledge and Gospel love in the heart, as that of water. We had the same image, you remember, used by our Lord a chapter or two ago, in His conversation

with the woman of Samaria. The Psalmist too speaks of "a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God;" and when the prophet Isaiah would invite the people to the abundance of the Gospel feast, his invitation runs in the same language, and adopts the same imagery: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;" and in another chapter he declares that "with joy shall they draw water out of the wells of salvation;" and still more expressively in the 44th chapter, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Nor are we left in any doubt as to the meaning of this imagery, for the evangelist here expressly declares that "He spake this of the Holy Ghost." It was no doubt by way of anticipation; but the fulfilment is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, in the completion of that prophecy of Joel, "And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh."

We, in this country, can have but a very imperfect conception of the beauty and appropriateness of this figure; and yet we can in some measure realize the change produced after long and sultry drought, by refreshing and fertilizing rains. It is true, we know not in our own land such a state as that described by Moses, when the heavens over head shall be as brass, and the earth beneath the feet as iron: but the expression is *hardly* too strong to portray the hardened ob-

duracy of a sinner's seared conscience, such as the majority of these Jews at this very moment evidenced. No return of kindness for unkindness, of good for evil on the part of Jesus, not all this display of love and yearning desire over them, not all these most precious and gracious offers of living water, could make the slightest impression on their hardened hearts. And do we wonder? Even now we see the same; even to this day "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him:" and one can well understand how even these precious promises, though drawn from their own Scriptures, would appear as among those hard sayings, which had already offended so many.


I do not think that we realize—that even God's own child can realize sufficiently—the overflowing love of this offer of Christ, or our need of it. We can tell what would be the result, if the Lord were to say to any land, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to My word;" but what would that soul be which was unwatered by the dew of God's Holy Spirit, on whose hardened heart no softening rain from heaven descended, but which was continually scorched and burned up by the fire of its own unhallowed, unrestrained passions. And then, look at the promise, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water:" that is, the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart shall be *as a fountain* or spring of grace,

ever overflowing and gushing forth in streams of holiness, purity, and love, and joy: no scanty stream, like summer brooks that scarcely trickle on, and are soon dried up, but "rivers"—and that not of dead nor turbid water, that has no freshness, no sparkling clearness, but "rivers of living water," such as that described in sacred song, "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon;" not "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed," but open and free to all, and flowing forth for the healing of the nations,—not afar off, and to be reached only with weariness and toil, or at distant intervals, but "out of his belly," from the inner springs of each one's own heart, till that blessed period, "when they shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

SECTION XLIII.

(Chapter vii. verse 40 to the end.)

WHAT an illustration does this conduct of the Jews afford of our Lord's parable of the sower! Here was the Sower of the seed of eternal life scattering His precious grain with an impartial and



unsparing hand over the soil of every Jewish heart. There was no stint in the seed itself, no flaw nor defect in the grain, no lack of energy, or love, or zeal, or skill, on the part of Him that scattered it; and yet there was a vast and fatal difference, and that difference was in the soil, in the hearts of those that heard the word. Of all that listened to the words of Jesus on this last day of the feast, one can hardly say that, as yet, there was that honest and good heart, which brought forth fruit, even thirtyfold. And yet we can as hardly doubt that this seed, though thus apparently cast upon the waters, was in many an instance to be found again of Him that sowed it, and rewarded openly.

We are expressly told in an earlier portion of the chapter that many believed on Him, and though that belief is confined to a somewhat doubtful avowal that He was the Christ, yet we may hope that He, who despises not the day of small things, and who assuredly did not reject the timid Nicodemus, will own and acknowledge some of these among His hidden and redeemed ones. I would however have you remember that it is a poor meagre religion to be ever hovering on the confines, and never going up and entering in to take possession: with just enough conviction of religious truth as to fear to be openly irreligious, and yet with so much love of the world, and so much fear of man, as not to close cordially and personally with the offers of Christ, and unreservedly follow

Him, whithersoever He goeth. There are I fear many of these almost Christians, these Agrippas in the world, but to what does it lead? to what did it lead those to whom Jesus addressed these gracious offers? Not to the humbling confession of the poor publican, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" not to the glorious acknowledgment of Peter, "Lord! to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!" but it led to controversy and dispute. I cannot but think that religion of a very questionable character, which leads to unprofitable janglings, and what the apostle calls, "doting about questions and strifes of words, whercof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings of men." "This is the Prophet," said one—"This is the Christ," said another—"Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" said a third—"Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet," said others. There was a great deal too much of it among these Jews, and there is a vast deal too much of it among ourselves at the present day; as if love, and charity, and peace, and good-will, and all the courtesies and amenities of a Christian heart and life flourished best in the rank hot-bed of acrimonious disputation. God never meant that all men should be of one mind, or one opinion, but He meant they should all be of one heart. "It were well," says one, "if the child of dissension were never born, or that it died as soon as born;" and there

is great meaning as well as beauty in the comprising all God's commandments into such a narrow compass, so easy to be retained in the memory. They were originally *ten*, but Christ brings them into *two*, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself;" and Paul goes beyond even his Master's rule, and reduces them into *one word*, "All the law is fulfilled in *one word*, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

It is a significant conclusion of all this sinful bickering which the evangelist here notes: "Every man went unto his own house," quite satisfied apparently with his own conduct, no prickings of conscience, no compunctions for the past, no going home to meditate on the truths they had heard, or to search the Scriptures whether these things were so, nor to pray for the enlightening grace of God to guide them into all truth; but, the major part at least, only to devise fresh schemes for carrying out their murderous purposes. And yet one can hardly think that all these gracious words and offers were uttered in vain—one can hardly think that all those, from whose softened and touched hearts burst forth that almost sublime acknowledgment, "Never man spake like this man," went their way, and straightway forgot what manner of man He was, of whom they spake this. One at least, who had courage to lift up a solitary, though perhaps a feeble and a timid voice, in behalf of Him he loved, continued we know to grow in

grace, for we hear of him again ; and though we hear not of the rest, yet we would fain hope that there was many a hidden one even then “ added to the Church, of such as should be saved.” Oh ! what an unfolding of love, what a revelation of wondrous power as well as mercy will that day manifest, when there shall once more be gathered before the Man Christ Jesus that same multitude, who stood and listened to Him on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and from whom so many turned away in scorn as the despised Galilean, or the rejected Nazarene. And if His voice on earth so melted and overcame those who were sent to sieze Him, and which spoke then only in accents of love, how will that same voice overwhelm those who refused to listen, when it speaks only in tones of wrath and fiery indignation ? whose voice,” says the Apostle, “ once shook the earth ;” but yet, “ once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”

“ See then that ye refuse not Him that speaketh” to us.

SECTION XLIV.

(Chapter viii. verse 1—11.)

To the pure, all things are pure : but I fear the converse of the proposition is more often true, and

that the impure can hardly tread anywhere without leaving traces of their impurity behind, like the foul reptile, which leaves the track of its slime wherever it crosses, or those unclean birds, which sought to come down on the patriarch's sacrifice, and which he was so watchful to drive away. There are passages of Scripture to which, more especially, the Lord's command may be well applied,—“Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” And so with regard to this portion of Scripture: some have excluded it altogether from the Word of God, from an over-strained scrupulousness and delicacy, and others have sought to justify their own iniquity by their misinterpretation of our Lord's words, “Neither do I condemn thee.” I believe, as I said just now, “to the pure all things are pure,” and that if we approach this narrative in a spirit of love and holy awe—of love to sinners, and of holy awe of Him in whose presence we, as well as these sinners of Jerusalem, were standing—we shall see much to call forth both our hatred of sin, and admiration at the long-suffering of Him who, though sin was the abominable thing in His sight, yet came into this very lazarus-house of sin, to seek and to save that which was lost; and who had before declared, with regard to those and such as those who stood before Him, “that publicans and harlots would sooner find admission *into the kingdom* of heaven than the

self-righteous, haughty, exclusive, and excluding Scribe and Pharisee.

We are apt to forget who the party was that thus early in the morning hurried into the temple, and rudely broke in upon the discourse of Jesus, as He was teaching there, as if their impatience and holy indignation at sin could brook no control, and might be permitted to break down the usual barriers of propriety and decorum. We are apt to look on the one criminal as filling up the foreground of the picture, and the very heading in our Bibles seems, alas! to countenance the error, as if this woman, guilty though she were, was the chief and only sinner there. It was not so. We may indeed say of her sin, in the words of the apostle, that it was "open beforehand, and going before to judgment," that is, so manifest and plain that one might readily and without error anticipate our judgment of them without entering into any judicial enquiry: and yet the hearts of those who were dragging her thus hurriedly to condemnation, disclose even deeper abysses than hers.

It is not necessary to enter into the minute details of this narrative—why our Lord stooped down, what he wrote, and the meaning attached to His words and conduct. I would just say that our Lord's posture at the time, as teaching, was a sitting one, and that the stooping was in all probability significant of that direction of the law, which, *under* circumstances like the present, charged the

priest to take of the dust of the floor of the tabernacle as a testimony against the offender, and might be intended to intimate our Lord's readiness to enter upon the accusation if all that were really guilty before Him would abide His searching scrutiny. But what I would especially call you to notice is the accurate and unerring knowledge, which the Lord has of every heart. It is a very easy virtue to be loud in our denunciations against sin—especially against another's sin—and at the same time to think that we are thereby most effectually blinding men's observation against our own. They are fittest to find fault, in whom there is no fault to be found. "If you must needs be a judge," says an old writer, "sit upon *your own* bench;" and such an one will too often find the same lusts lodging in his own bosom, that may be reigning in another's life. It was so here: there was a power accompanying the Lord's act, which at once convicted these sinners. While he stooped down, His eye rested not on them, and they peradventure thought that he was such an one as themselves; but when he lifted up Himself, and that omniscient eye gazed upon them, and read the very secrets of their hearts as clearly as they had read the open act of the poor sinner that stood trembling before them, they too felt, that He who made the eye, shall not He see—and He who fashioned the heart, shall He not read its every thought?

I would say one word respecting the woman herself. No tribunal had indeed pronounced her guilty—no judge had condemned her—her accusers, too eager to entrap Jesus, had brought her before no authorized court, and had now left her without a proof of their charge against her. But did our Lord acquit her too? Assuredly not. Did He speak lightly of her sin?—in no degree. He looked indeed compassionately on the sinner, but He recognized her sin; and while He refused the office of a Judge and Lawgiver over her, in His character as a Saviour He bade her “go and sin no more.” I think there is an especial significance both in what our Lord did say, and in what He did not say. He said, “Go and sin no more,” but He did not say, “Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee.” I presume not to say there was not penitence in that sinner’s heart. I would hope and believe there was, and that there was both peace and forgiveness for her at the last; but we do not know it; and there is in our Lord’s language no assurance of it, assuredly no intimation that her sin was light, or her pardon easy. And if any are found to justify their own sin and uncleanness by our Lord’s words on this occasion, I would say to them, in the words of Bishop Hall, that I believe “it is a fearful risk to attempt to jump from the lap of Delilah into Abraham’s bosom,” and I would bid them at least remember that the injunction to this poor sinner, was to “sin no more.”

Whatever might be the result of this interview between the sinner and the Saviour of sinners, this I know, that she will have to stand once more before Him, and her accusers face to face; and neither the one nor the other will abide the solemn scrutiny of that searching hour, any more than they did in the temple at Jerusalem, unless washed and made clean in the blood of the Lamb.

SECTION XLV.

(Chapter viii. verse 12—20.)

WE are not told what had been the subject of our Lord's discourse, as He sat teaching in the temple, when he was so rudely interrupted by the incident we yesterday considered. It is probable that He is now only resuming the subject, which had been broken off; and, at any rate, as I remarked a short time ago, it was no unusual thing for Jesus to draw the most striking illustrations from surrounding and immediate objects; and we might in many an instance sketch both the place where the Saviour was, and the occupations that were going on around Him from the imagery they supply for the illustration of His discourse. In the present instance we might go somewhat *further*, and though we had not been

told that it was "early in the morning" we might well conceive how this beautiful and appropriate metaphor of light was suggested by the brilliance of the morning sun resting on the gilded domes and pinnacles of the temple, or breaking in and lighting up its pillared courts within. It was an image, which had before drawn forth the inspired strains of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, when he described the Almighty as "setting a tabernacle in the heavens for the sun, coming forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoicing to run his course." It was an appropriate transition from the natural to the spiritual sun, and as there is one sun to give light to the natural world, so is there one sun of righteousness to enlighten and cheer the spiritual world. And yet I cannot but think it probable that our Lord as He proceeded to say, "He that followeth Me, shall have the light of life," might have intended to carry back the minds and memories of those who heard Him to that early period of their history, when He Himself went before them as a pillar of fire by night and gave them light, or as Nehemiah described it, "Thou leddest them in the night by a pillar of fire to give them light in the way wherein they should go;" so, "he that followeth Me, shall have the light of life." It is an image of perfect security, perfect safety, unerring guidance, and direction—no way-farer need err therein, and as the pillar of fire guided His people through the dark-

ness of the night, and amid the trackless wilderness, so does He, who is "the light of life," guide His people still, through all the dark mazes of their pilgrimage; and he that followeth that light, keeping his eye steadfastly fixed on it, and not afraid to trust it, and follow it, whithersoever it may lead him, will assuredly, in the Lord's own time, reach the promised land. Or, we may take an earlier period, and looking upon the pillar as it appeared to the Israelites and their enemies on the shores of the Red Sea; that which was light, and gave light to God's people, was darkness, and only darkness, to their enemies: that which guided the one to safety, was only ruin to the others. So is it now; the Gospel is still a savour of life unto life to some, while it is only a savour of death unto death to others. The Egyptians on that night knew not, and dreamed not of the light that was guiding the Hosts of Israel in safety, and to safety; and the children of this world little think, how "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." But oh! what a difference between the sun in the heavens, glorious as it is, and the pillar of fire in the desert, unerring though it was, and Christ as the Light of His people! "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel." The people that sat in darkness did indeed see a great light, when the sun of righteousness arose upon the benighted world; but the natural sun

may shine on many a sorrowing heart, its beams may enter many a mourning chamber,—nay, it may arise in the morning in all its wonted brightness over many a guilty one that shall not see its setting, as it did over-doomed Sodom. And even its own brightness is one day to be darkened and extinguished. There will be no more need of its material light; but where Christ shines, there can be no more sorrow; into whatsoever heart He enters with healing on His beams, sorrow, and sighing shall flee away; and though there be still the remains of sin, the wounds and the scars of the conflict, “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;” and when at length guided in safety through the dark valley of the shadow of death to the land that is “afar off,” they have entered the New Jerusalem, then will they see how “the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” The pillar of fire, too, like the manna on which their fathers fed, has passed away; its light no longer shines, no longer guides, and though those that followed it were guided aright, and “led by the right way,” yet we might ask with the prophet, “your fathers, where are they? and thy prophets, do they live for ever?” But Christ liveth for ever, and because He liveth, we shall live also. “The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon

give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." One only wonders how these Pharisees, with their knowledge of their own Scriptures, when this glorious truth, though perhaps but dimly shadowed forth, was yet uttered in their hearing, could again have recourse to their petty cavils and disputings. Oh, what a tainted atmosphere must that of controversy be, which can thus send up its impure mists and exhalations to obscure the light of this most precious truth, and which the evangelist so delighted to record. It was almost the earliest truth he penned in this Gospel, and even then he recorded also the sad inability of corrupt and fallen man to comprehend it. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." It is however a most precious Gospel truth, that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Are any of us slumbering in the darkness of ignorance, of sin, or unbelief? "What meanest thou, O, sleeper? arise—awake from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

SECTION XLVI.

(Chapter viii. verse 21—27.)

How very different are the feelings, and motives, and actions, and language of a man of God, and a man of the world! I do not wonder at the misunderstanding that so continually exists between them; I should rather wonder if it were otherwise, for our Lord here assigns the reason. The one is from above, the other from beneath; the one of this world, the other not of this world; the one with the affections set on things above, the other on things on the earth. And this difference has ever existed. David complained of it in his own case with respect to those with whom he came in contact, who daily mistook and perverted his words; and here the Son of David had far ampler reason to complain of the same wilful misunderstanding and perversion of His words. In the case of David, his enemies reproachfully asked him in his distress, "where is now thy God?" and so here with Jesus, when He was speaking of His departure out of this world, and the withdrawal of salvation from the impenitent and unbelieving Jews, and as a consequence of their dying in that hardened state of sin and unbelief, their irrevocable *exclusion* from heaven, that, though they might *seek Him* at the last, it would not be till the door

of mercy had been barred and closed by their own obstinacy, and that therefore where He was going, they could by no possibility come. His adversaries intentionally pervert His meaning, and thus exculpate themselves from any blame in refusing to follow Him as a guide. "Whither I go, ye cannot come," said the Saviour; and why? "Because ye shall die in your sin; and, dying in sin, shall be eternally shut out from heaven, and my Father's presence." "He is intending to destroy Himself," is the preposterous but malevolent inference of the Jews. Jesus deigns not to refute their base insinuation, but in the most solemn and awful language reiterates His warning, that if they believe not in Him, they will, they must die in their sins; in the sin of unbelief, as well as in all those multiplied transgressions to which unbelief would lead them. It is indeed a fearful warning, "Ye shall die in your sins;" but are the Jews to whom Jesus spake the only ones to whom the words apply? Might we not go into almost every house, and alas! of some inmate or other beneath its roof say, "And unless *you* repent, you too shall die in your sins."

It is no irrevocable doom of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord; it was not even to these Jews: there was mercy for them, if they would know in time the things belonging to their peace, before they were for ever hidden from *their* eyes. But their prejudiced

hearts and proud conceits of themselves refused to admit the belief that they were in darkness, or that the despised Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the light of the world, and they consequently would not go to Him that they might have life. How then could they possibly escape the condemnation of unbelief? "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." If there be no other name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved, and they reject and cast out that name as evil, how can they be saved from eternal condemnation? It is a very striking passage as to the extent, as well as necessity of belief in Christ; a belief in His atoning blood alone for the remission of sins: and for a moment one might almost think it had startled even these bold cavillers, for they at least ask, "Who art Thou?" If such be the fearful consequences of unbelief in Thee, tell us plainly who Thou art. And what is the reply of Jesus? It is no denial of their demand, though He might justly have withheld an answer in righteous retribution for their unbelief. It is no doubtful declaration of the truth, which might have left them still to cavil at His meaning; but it is a plain and explicit avowal of the same great truth He had before declared. "Who art Thou?" was the question, "Jesus saith unto them, 'Even the same that I said unto you at the beginning.'" *And what was that? The very first words of that discourse which He had spoken on that morning*

in the temple were, "I am the light of the world:" or as this evangelist writes in the beginning of his Gospel, "This is the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

And now let us leave these Jews, and ask ourselves "Are we walking in their light, or in darkness; are we believing in Christ, or disbelieving; are we receiving Christ in all His fulness, or have we no part nor lot in the matter? It will not do to fritter away nor pare down any portion of this great salvation: Christ is all in all to His people, or He is nothing. "Ye shall die in your sins," is the denunciation here annexed to unbelief. Have you ever considered the awful meaning attached to these words, or the consequences they involve? It is not merely that a man shall continue in a hardened impenitent state to the very last; but "after death cometh the judgment," and "dying in sin" implies "rising again in sin;" and of all those that forget and forsake God, it is expressly said, "they shall be turned into hell." And yet I would say, behold, now in the day of salvation, God is continually crying to all that are walking in darkness, "why will you die? Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." Let us put all this together: as one apostle saith, "God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth;" and as another apostle writes, "He is not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance;” if then any do “die in their sins” it is because they will not come to Christ that they might have life, because they will not follow Him, who is the light of the world.

SECTION XLVII.

(Chapter viii. verse 28—32.)

“THE Lord knoweth them that are His.” Had a bystander given his opinion of those who were listening to Jesus, judging by what he heard and saw he would have declared of all, that, save his own immediate followers, they were deadly enemies of the Lord. Indeed Jesus directly charges them as a body with seeking to kill Him, and nothing can exceed the coarse, and rude, and scornful manner in which they reject His warnings, deny His mission, and deride His doctrines, as we find it in this chapter. And yet here again is the parable of the sower illustrated. The seed indeed in the majority of cases fell on hard and barren ground, or amid Jewish prejudices and was choked; but it was not altogether lost or scattered in vain. Even amid that unlikely multitude there were some honest and good hearts, on which the seed fell, and brought forth fruit. The *evangelist* says, “There were many which believed

on Him." Oh! blessed power of God's sovereign and electing grace, that could, out of such discordant materials, find some to glorify and do Him honour, that from stones so unsightly could find any fitted to build up and adorn His spiritual house, that could so unerringly sift the wheat from the chaff, and not suffer one grain to fall through.

I do not indeed wonder that many believed on Jesus; the wonder is, that all did not, that Pharisees and Sadducees, scribes and lawyers, did not at one simultaneous instant throw aside every prejudice, and cry out, as Israel did on Carmel, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." It is, however, added that "many believed on Him, as He spake these words;" what were these wonder-working words? "When ye shall have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He." And yet one cannot but feel, that powerful as they were in the mouth of Him that used them, they were humanly speaking the least likely to effect their end, their meaning unintelligible to those He spake, and referring chiefly to a future period, and an event yet to be accomplished. And yet I cannot doubt that these "many," who then believed were but as foretastes of that period of our Lord's own words afterwards: "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Even now, ere His death of shame had entered into the guilty heart of man to conceive,

He points to it as His future glory, and His exceeding great reward; and His Father sealed His words and confirmed them as His own by this sign following of the many that believed on Him, even before He was lifted up. There is something very sweet to think how God's own Word, even in passages which to us seem so outwardly unlikely, never returns unto Him void, but accomplishes that whereunto it is sent. And, oh, what a word of consolation and encouragement is here to many a heart-sickened minister of Christ even now, that where all may seem opposition, and even scurrility and persecution, still there may be some hidden ones secretly won to believe in Jesus, and to follow Him as their light even in the midst of surrounding darkness, and though many a sigh may heave, and many a tear fall at the thought that all is barren, and he is spending his labour for that which satisfieth not, yet "the Lord knoweth them that are His," and may have many a secret one that has not bowed the knee to Baal. Despondency is not confined to Elijah only; and, oh! how will the Lord's harvest-day gladden and surprize many a disappointed sower, who has sown in tears alone, and not been allowed to see or to know of the many sheaves that have ripened beneath his culture in his own field of labour! It is, however, a valuable caution which our Lord gives to these believers, and to ourselves, *to continue in His Word.* There is such a thing

we know as receiving the Word even with joy, and for a time seemingly growing and putting forth the semblance of fruit; but, by and by, when persecution, or trial, or temptation ariseth, then cometh the offence; it may be some "hard saying," some stricter precept, some restraint that interferes with a cherished desire of the heart, some flower that is blooming on the other side of the border, and attracts the eye and woos the step to cross the confines; and they go away and walk no more with Jesus. It is not Demas alone, who is drawn back by the love of the present world; nor Galatians only, who did run well, and yet have been hindered in obeying the truth. It is no unmeaning precept, "Be thou faithful unto death;" for fidelity should have no pauses in its service, nor love any interruption in its work; and it is only of those who continue in Christ's service as faithful and obedient followers, that He says, "Ye are my disciples indeed."

SECTION XLVIII.

(Chapter viii. verse 33—36.)

THERE is some little difficulty as to who these persons were that made this reply to Jesus, as to their never having been in bondage. It could not *have been those* who had just been declared to

have believed on Jesus, and to whom that gracious assurance had been given that the truth should make them free; and though John does not make any distinction between those who spoke and those who believed, it must evidently have been some of the bystanders, to whom the declaration was galling and offensive, as intimating that they were in a state of bondage, an imputation they most angrily resented. Their proud stomachs could not brook the idea of slavery, and with haughty supercilious bearing they repudiate in disdain the idea that they had ever been in bondage to any man. There is nothing, I really think, which the natural man so much resents as an imputation on his personal freedom, of his not being at perfect liberty to do what, and to go where, he likes, and that there is some one who exercises control over him. Even the very "child who is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father," kicks at the wholesome discipline of restraint; and there is perhaps no incentive so powerful, no weapon so sure to hit its mark in enticing to evil, especially among the young, as to suggest to any one that he dare not do it. It is evident these Jews looked upon the charge as affecting their own personal and individual liberty, and not in any degree applying to them as a nation. They never could have forgotten that dismal page in their own history of their Egyptian bondage, or their Babylonish captivity: they could hardly, at the very time they

spoke, have looked into any street of their own city, or paid a single tribute, without being reminded that even at the moment they were uttering the words, "the sceptre had departed from Judah." "We have no king but Cæsar," was their own acknowledgment. I think, however, we may learn in this instance a far more valuable lesson from our Lord's teaching, and, passing over Jewish or national bondage, look alone to those more general, but most solemn truths, which our Lord here utters—that the real slave, the real bondsman is he who is the slave of sin, and that the only true liberty is that Christian liberty wherewith Christ makes us free. How comprehensive is our Lord's saying, "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." Had these Jews at all guessed at the spiritual meaning of the words, how would it at once have put an end to all their rude cavils, and unfounded boastings, and set them on that enquiry as to their real state, which might have issued in true and genuine freedom. Our Lord's assertion indeed involves all those apparent paradoxes or contrarieties, which are so perplexing and puzzling to the natural man, or the mere man of the world. The most despotic monarch that ever sat on an eastern throne whose word was law, and whose will rule, might yet be the veriest slave of his own ungoverned passions, and of that still stronger master, who was leading him captive *at his will*; while, at the same time, the

poorest slave, that ever crouched beneath a taskman's lash, might enjoy a liberty in his Father's house, from which the sordid tyrant that ill-used him, was altogether excluded.

A great deal has been heard of late of slavery : it has been brought more graphically and vividly before men's minds, by touching and pathetic descriptions of its horrors ; and yet we have little thought of that cruel tyranny and hard bondage in which so many of our fellow-creatures are enthralled at home, or have been earnest to proclaim that glorious liberty which awaits the ransomed and redeemed of the Lord. To sell a fellow-creature is justly regarded as the most abominable traffic ; and the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth have too long heard the cry of the negro race ; but in what traffic is the sinner engaged ? It is said of Ahab, that wicked king of Israel, that veriest slave of his own miserable passions, that "there was none like him who did *sell himself* to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord." Just reflect one moment on that expression, "did sell himself." "No man," says the apostle, "ever yet hated his own flesh ;" and therefore to sell oneself into vile and miserable bondage, is the grossest infatuation as well as degradation. And who is the purchaser ? It is the devil, who bids high but pays little ; for what are the wages he gives ? "The wages of sin are death." The sinner buys *dear*, for he gives himself, his soul ; and Satan

buys cheap, for he generally outwits his customers, and leaves them in the lurch. So that in reality the Word of God describes the sinner, or Satan's slave, as a trafficker in human flesh, and that flesh his own, entering into a voluntary bargain with the enemy of souls to "sell himself," body and soul, for the poor perishing pittance of profit or pleasure that Satan has to give.

There are too such numberless grades of slavery: any one of us sitting here apparently in all the independence of his own free-will, at liberty to go here, or there, or anywhere, no man hindering or forbidding him, may yet be, even when he least suspects it, little better than a slave. "The fear of man, which bringeth a snare," is one of the links of Satan's chain—the love of the world and its vanities, another—the bondage of fashion, custom, and that fatal question which so many ask themselves, "What will the world say? what will people think?" is another. And is there no such thing as the slavery of an evil temper, and the bondage of a long continued habit, even though harmless in itself? It is no unmeaning confession which our Church has put into the mouth of her worshippers, that "we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins." How appropriate then the petition, that "the pitifulness of God's great mercy may loose us." There is too one bondage especially in which many, even of God's own children, are held, who go heavily

and mourn by reason of their burden, even though the Lord came on purpose that He might, as the apostle speaks, "deliver them, who, through fear of death, were all their life subject to bondage." What a glorious comment on the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free, does the apostle give us in that noble chapter, the 8th of Romans, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God; for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." And again: "The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

SECTION XLIX.

(Chapter viii. verse 37—47.)

WE have here a very striking assertion from our Lord's own lips, that merely outward privileges avail nothing but to the increase of condemnation: and we see how, in the case of the Jews, though possessed, retained, and boasted of, they had been most fearfully abused and rested in. It was, no doubt, no insignificant honour to be a descendant of Abraham, the father of the faithful, *the friend of God*. It was from among those

descendants that the Son of God, when about to come in the flesh, selected to take His earthly origin. It was among the promised privileges conveyed to Abraham, that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed: and well therefore might the descendants of Abraham rejoice in the honoured distinction that they too were of the seed of Abraham; and had the question been proposed to Jesus, which St. Paul afterwards supposed as put to himself, "What advantage then hath the Jew?" Jesus would have answered, as His apostle afterwards did, "Much every way." It is a great advantage to have these outward privileges, and a sad privation either to nations or individuals, when they are withdrawn in anger. It is a great privilege to be born in a Christian land—to be the child of Christian parents, parents who are not only Christians in name, but in deed: and it is a great privilege too to live in a Christian household where Christian responsibility is acknowledged, and Christian love exercised; but how continually do we see all these privileges, not only neglected and disregarded, but abused and perverted. Even in a Christian land, God's Sabbaths are thrust aside as interruptions and unwelcome hindrances; the Sabbath bells sweetly chime, but too often, in deaf or at least unwilling ears. Christian parents who strive the most earnestly to bring up their *little ones as children of God*, and to train them

for the Lord, are the most often disappointed, and their lives embittered, and their hearts crushed, by the alienation and misconduct of those most dear to them; and many a servant has quitted a holy home, where at least it could not be said that no one cared for their soul, in the mistaken hope to better and amend their lot, and in that change, it may be to an ungodly household, has made shipwreck of every hope, not only for time, but for eternity.

I am very far therefore from saying to you, "Be indifferent to Christian ordinances, or regard them as things of little moment;" very far from it,—they are appointments of God, and what the Lord has appointed, He will assuredly bless, if used aright, and valued according to His valuation. They are like the steps on Jacob's ladder, by which access to heaven was attained, but on which God's angels were continually ascending and descending to guide our feeble steps, and assure our timid courage, sent of God especially to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation. But if, even on that ladder, whose top reached unto heaven, man's steps were to linger, if he were to rest on its first, or its midmost round, or even ascending to the highest, and there stop, he would stop short of heaven. Forgetting the steps he has already passed, he must press onwards, and even when he has reached the top, Christ is "*the Door*," and if he knocks in any other name,

or claims admission in any other right, he will find the door closed and barred against him, because he has been resting in his own efforts, looking *on* them, and looking *off* from Jesus. The great point which our Lord here enforces, is the necessity of living consistently with the privileges vouchsafed to us. It was in this these Jews were so deficient; "Abraham is our father," they cry; "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham," is the answer of Jesus. "We have one Father, even God" is their next haughty boast: "If God were your Father, ye would love Me, for I proceeded forth, and came from God," is again the reply of Jesus—for as this evangelist, no doubt recalling to mind the words of His Master, argues in another place, "Every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him that is begotten of Him," and Jesus Himself says, "If ye love Me, keep my commandments;" and in the same spirit, the apostle Paul writes, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity." That is the test. There are but two classes of persons, subdivide them as you will; there are but two families, into how many soever households they may be separated; God's people and Satan's people—the Lord's children and the devil's children. If we are of the first, we shall do the works of God, love the ways of God, His people, His law, His ordinances—if we are of the latter, we too shall do of the lusts of our father;

and the great danger is, that while doing his work, he will persuade us, as he did these Jews, that we are all the while safe in those outward privileges, which he gladly allows us to retain, as behind their veil, he can carry on his own devices unseen and unrecognized. He was indeed a murderer, as well as a liar from the very beginning. We know not the falsehoods by which he won his associate spirits to revolt with him,

“ Whom he seduced
With other promises, and other vaunts,
Than to submit, boasting he could subdue
Th’ omnipotent.”

but we know how he lied unto Eve, “Ye shall not surely die;” and it is still the same reiterated lie. “The wages of sin is death,” is God’s word; “Ye shall not surely die, is Satan’s word; and it is a fearful truth, with which our Lord concludes this portion of Scripture, that “if we hear not God’s words, it is because we are not of God.”

SECTION L.

(Chapter viii. verse 48 to the end.)

How easy is it to scatter names and terms of reproach! And yet such are too often like those *curses*, of which the proverb of the ancients says,

that "they are like young chickens, which come home to roost." These malignant Jews were not content to revile Jesus alone, but in their spite and malice, must needs scatter firebrands of reproach and odium against their neighbours the Samaritans, as if the worst stigma they could affix to Jesus was, that he must be a Samaritan, nay, as if in their estimation "to be a Samaritan," and "have a devil," were nearly equivalent terms. It is a sad evidence of that spirit of hatred, malice, and uncharitableness, which thus breaks forth without restraint against nations and individuals, and with such indiscriminate and unsparing malevolence, involves all alike in the same general condemnation. Many a Samaritan in the last day will rise up and condemn the Jews of that generation; of the ten lepers, whom Jesus healed, a Samaritan was the only grateful one. Jesus had long resided, and preached, and performed miracles in the cities of Galilee; and yet at Nazareth, the home of His childhood, they had sought His life; at Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and Capernaum, they had alike rejected His mission, and thrown scorn on His credentials, while at Sychar, the Samaritan village, He had stayed only two days, and though no recorded miracle testified of His power, yet from His word alone, many a Samaritan believed on Him. It is no doubt in righteous retribution, therefore, that the Jew who thus thought and uttered foul scorn of the Samaritan, has himself

been as much a term of reproach and shame through the wide world, as ever Samaritan was to him. "Thou art a Jew;" malice could go no further—hatred could utter no worse, contempt could sink no lower; and yet one could wish it had been, and were even now otherwise, that we might remember that the Jew is our elder brother, and though disinherited for a season, is yet "beloved for the father's sakes," that through the Jew, we possess all our hopes and privileges, that to the Jew was committed the keeping of the oracles of God, and that to them pertained the adoption: that the sweet singer of Israel, whose Psalms and spiritual songs are still the solace of the mourner, the staff of the pilgrim, and the triumph of the saint, was himself a Jew; and that He, who was thus opprobriously stigmatized as a Samaritan, and possessed of a devil, was a Jew likewise. Nor let us forget with especial gratitude, that he, whose Gospel we are now reading, and who has left us such sweet records of his Saviour's teaching, and his own loving spirit, was a Jew also. It was thrown in Peter's path, as a stumbling block, "Thou art also one of them;" and even at this day, there are those in whose mouths "Thou art a Christian," is equivalent to being called a dog. It is a poor resource to which anger resorts, when it can find no better vent, than evil names and contemptuous appellations.

Throughout the whole of this chapter these

Jews were most obstinate in perverting and misunderstanding our Lord's meaning, and one is almost inclined to think that they purposely mistook it, for we see them, when it suited their purpose, and gave them a handle for outrage, quick enough in catching the sense in which Jesus uttered that most solemn truth, "Before Abraham was, I AM." They did not falter a moment in understanding that He who then stood before them a living man, and with whom they had been thus rudely cavilling, meant by that expression not merely to intimate His own pre-existence to Abraham but His claim to that incommunicable name of Jehovah, by which He revealed Himself to Moses: "I AM THAT I AM. I AM hath sent Me unto you." When, as they chose to believe, Jesus asserted of Himself that He was a contemporary with Abraham, that He who was then actually living, had yet walked and talked with that patriarch two thousand years before, they only laughed Him to scorn, and sneeringly asked, "*Thou* seen Abraham! Thou art not fifty years old!" But when Jesus added and took to Himself the awful name "I AM," then, in unrestrained horror, they would have stoned Him, for the supposed blasphemy. I would however say that this very act of the Jews, their intended outrage, and their reason for it, leave us without excuse, if we reject the solemn truth that Jesus claimed to Himself, to be in very deed and truth God from ever-

lasting ; before Abraham, before all worlds. The Jews, it is true, disbelieved and denied His claim, but they did not mistake nor pervert His meaning, as they distinctly declared afterwards, " For a good work we stone Thee not, but for blasphemy, because that Thou being a man makest Thyself God." I need not now stop to explain how God revealed Christ's day to Abraham ; we know that He did so, and that, as Paul affirms, " God before preached the Gospel unto Abraham." But I would rather draw a practical lesson for ourselves from the earnest longing which Abraham felt *that he might see* the day of Christ, for that is the meaning of the words " rejoiced to see." And yet he had to see that day dimly shadowed forth to him in the unbloody sacrifice of his own son—the ram the victim slain, and Isaac at once the type of the victim, and of the sinner freed. Abraham had to see this through the comparatively obscure vision of intervening ages, in a representation, or as the Apostle speaks, " in a parable" or figure. It was on that solitary Mount of Moriah, where himself and his son alone stood, the representatives of the whole human race ; and yet how earnestly did the patriarch long to see, how gratefully and gladly did he rejoice when he had seen the day of Christ. Many prophets and kings desired to see Christ's day on earth, yet saw it not,—that day has now come, but there is another day of Christ yet to come. *Are we longing earnestly for that day, are we lifting*

up our hearts with those beneath the altar and saying, "How long, O Lord, how long." And when our "Redeemer shall stand at the latter day upon the earth," not Abraham and Isaac alone, nor prophets and kings only, but all His saints shall come with Him, and "they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him." But those who would not that Christ should reign over them, and have no interest in Him, shall have no part in that resurrection.

SECTION LI.

(Chapter ix. verse 1—12.)

It was a strange question which these disciples here asked their Master respecting the man born blind, whether it was in punishment of his own or his parents' sin that he had been blind from his birth. One could understand how, for a parent's sin, such a bitter and painful trial might be sent by the Almighty, not in wrath, but in mercy: though in general we are sadly wrong in attributing these trials to retributive acts of justice. In one sense indeed all suffering springs from sin; if there were no sin, there would be no suffering, if sin had never entered and marred the beautiful creation of God, all would have remained, as He pronounced it, "very good." There would have

been no sorrow, no tears, no blindness, no infirmity of mind, nor defect of body. It is far otherwise now—there may be no doubt many and many a family in which there is no child born blind, but there is not one however small into which trial and sorrow and anxiety have not found admission. There are however families into which even this sadness of a child blind from its birth has found access, or the still severer trial of a child devoid of reason—but is an unfeeling or thoughtless passer-by, as he gazes on the sorrowing parents, or the stricken victim, entitled to ask which has sinned? or with flippant tone to impute the trial to the parent's sin, and suppose that the Lord in righteous anger has wounded their hearts through the medium of a guiltless child? It would be sin indeed to think so, it would be cruelty to give utterance to the thought; and our Lord here intimates how far removed from man's puny measurement are the tender compassions and the boundless mercies of His Father's love.

I have often seen, and no doubt each one of you may have seen, a similar scene of trial and privation to that which now met the eyes of Jesus as He passed by. We may know among our own acquaintance, or have met in our wanderings, or have heard of in our neighbourhood some such afflicted one as this poor man. To him indeed there was an added trial in the poverty of his condition, *for he "sat and begged."* And I confess that as

one sometimes sees in the streets of London a similar object to that which now attracted the eyes of the compassionate Redeemer in Jerusalem,—a blind man who “sits and begs,”—one’s heart is peculiarly touched and opened to the sadness of such a sight, and one’s memory cannot help recurring to this blessed Sabbath-day, when Jesus, as He passed along the streets of Jerusalem, saw this blind man, and had compassion on him; and though we cannot “go and do likewise” in the literal sense, there are many and many sitting in as great darkness too, to whom we may by our teaching, by our means, by our self-denial, help to give light, and in the same spirit of love wherewith He loved us, love our brother also. And I can well believe that when such a sight as one blind from the birth meets our eyes, the question may, almost unbidden, arise in our minds, why God—a God so abundant in loving-kindness, whose mercies are over all His works, should consign a being, guiltless as to actual sin, to irrecoverable darkness; that all those beauties of creation, the sun, and the moon, and the stars in their glory, the flower in its brilliance, the tree in its foliage, the everlasting hills, the valleys thick with corn, and the river in its beauty, all so indicative of the goodness and love of God should yet be a blank to any. For myself, indeed, I have had to speak comfort to sorrowing parents, as the truth has unwillingly *and slowly* developed itself, that they

too had a child that was born blind : and though I might have reasoned with them on the uselessness of repining over an irremediable evil, they would have felt, that like Job's friends, I was only " a miserable comforter ;" and that all the arguments drawn from reason, or even all the sympathies of a feeling heart could never dry such a mourner's tears. No ! in such trials as these, in such mysterious dispensations we must go at once to the fountain-head of consolation, we must go to Him who has wounded, and who alone can heal, we must seek out Him who in all our afflictions is Himself afflicted, and who, with such especial tenderness, binds up and carries in His own bosom the torn and the bleeding of His lambs and little ones.

We must go to this 9th chapter of St. John's Gospel, and hear the tender and compassionate Jesus explaining to His enquiring disciples, why the man they saw was born blind. The visitation was in no wrath, nor offended retribution : " Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents." Why then ? " that the works of God should be made manifest in him." It was for God's glory, it was for the manifestation of God's power and mercy ; and in that view, in that declaration, every murmur is hushed, every sigh is stilled ; and if a tear still falls, as perchance it may, it is no longer the tear of unmingled bitterness, or complaining expostulation, but of calm submission, of patient resignation, nay of cheerful acquiescence, and trium-

phant faith. In the present case it was at once seen that it was for the Lord's glory, and that the power of God might be made manifest in him. The same voice that thrilled over the darkened chaos, as the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters, and said, "Let there be light, and there was light,"—that same almighty voice bade darkness disappear from the sightless eyeballs, and it was so. But it is not so now; no miracle of mercy restores sight to those born blind; no Saviour passes by to make manifest the works of God in bidding darkness depart—but are not the works of mercy and love, and compensating tenderness as manifest in the continuance as in the removal of the trial? Is there not a peculiar sympathy for the blind, a chord in each of our hearts, which the Lord seems to strike, and which gives utterance only to love and pity. Do we not also especially notice in these smitten ones of the Lord a peculiar gentleness, nay, cheerfulness of temper, which seems to indicate not only peace within, but as if there were a hidden light, even in their darkness, sent alike to comfort and to guide them on their way. One seems to believe that God is ever whispering to them, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee."

SECTION LII.

(Chapter ix. verse 13—23.)

IT might have been, not only with very innocent, but with even praise-worthy motives, that the neighbours of this blind man brought him to the Pharisees, that they too might be witnesses of the fact of his cure, and join in the glad acknowledgment that a great Prophet had risen up among them; and charity assuredly would wish to think no evil. Yet I fear their previous questionings even as to the identity of a man known to them, not only as their neighbour, but familiar no doubt to every one, as the poor blind beggar that sat and solicited alms, and their pretended doubts as to whether he was the same man or one only resembling him in features, rather lead to the opposite conclusion—that, in carrying the matter before the council of the Pharisees, they sought only to make a charge against Jesus for His supposed violation of the Sabbath-day. It is singular how even ungodly men can reason correctly enough on an abstract question, when brought before them—that is, a question which only asserts a general truth, and does not touch themselves more than others—and pronounce a righteous judgment, when it squares with their own views. It was their policy, or what they conceived to be their interest, to depreciate Jesus; to decry, if they

could not deny, His miracles, and to lessen Him as far as they could in the estimation of the people. They gladly avail themselves therefore of the circumstances of this miracle having been performed on the Sabbath-day, to denounce our Lord as a violator of God's commandments, and consequently as not of God: "This man is not of God, because He keepeth not the Sabbath-day." It is quite possible therefore, you see, to utter a very solemn and important truth, and yet be quite mistaken in the application of it. It was so here—a more important truth was never spoken by the lips of man, and yet the application of it to Jesus was altogether unfounded. One cannot help thinking of what the Spirit of God has recorded of Judas, who murmured at what he called a waste of money, alleging it might have been much better expended on the poor: "This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." So these Jews, I suspect, cared very little for the sanctity of the Sabbath, provided they could only get up a grievance against Jesus. Works of mercy and labours of love they would prohibit on the Sabbath, while at the same time they were ready to bind burdens on other men's backs, which they themselves would not touch with one of their fingers. And yet no doubt it was a very solemn truth which these Jews here uttered. Strip it of its application to Jesus,

and the truth is, that he is not of God, who keeps not the Sabbath-day. It is a very simple truth, so simple that the most unlearned can understand it, without the aid of scholarship or even the knowledge of letters. I would say that there is not a man living, who does not perfectly and thoroughly understand what is meant when it is said, "A man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath-day." I should almost wrong the youngest child in an infant school by supposing that these words were above its comprehension. We hear a great deal in the present day of ministers preaching above their people; that they aim at the head and not at the heart, and therefore miss both. I would simply say of every minister, "Would to God they were more zealous, more faithful, more simple-minded!" But still, after all, the darkness is over men's own eyes, the veil is over their own hearts: men will not come to the light that they may see, or rather *lest they should see*, and the light should make them uneasy. Let earthly ministers be what they may, the Lord has placed a preacher in every man's heart, that tells the plainest truths—a preacher who, *before* a man sins, warns him against it, and *after he has sinned*, never leaves him in ignorance of his guilt and danger. That preacher is conscience. And how do men deal with that monitor? Do they tell him that he is above their *comprehension*, that they do not understand him?

No! his fault is, he is too faithful, too plain, too close, too searching; and God has left on record the very language in which a man deals with and dismisses a too faithful monitor, whether it be his minister or his own conscience, "Go thy way for this time," said Felix to his plain-speaking preacher, "when I have a convenient season I will send for thee."

"A man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath-day." Is there any difficulty, any ambiguity in these words? Why, even the very Sabbath-breaker himself would not deny that he perfectly understood their meaning! He would never pretend that he was doing God's work as one of His people, while he was finding his own pleasure, and engaged in the directly contrary service of the world, the flesh, and the devil! He would never have the effrontery to declare that he was seeking God's glory, doing God's will, and obeying God's commandments, while he was avowedly dishonouring His name, frustrating His will, and violating His law! As I said before, man may deny, may evade, may defy, and disregard it, but he cannot misunderstand it; and it is this simplicity of God's words, and distinctness of God's meaning, that renders it so valuable, and at the same time so awful; for we shall find Jesus, in a succeeding chapter, declaring to these very Pharisees, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge them at the last day. And

whether God's commandment be spoken, as it was uttered from Sinai in the Hebrew language, or whether it be in our own English vernacular, the language is too plain, the words too simple, for any intellect to mistake. Why, then, we may well ask, Why, with all this simplicity, plainness, and straightforwardness of meaning in God's Word, with regard to the Sabbath-day, do we find that in practice and reality there is not one commandment so openly and avowedly violated, so trampled under foot, so set at nought and despised by the vast majority? The answer is the easiest of all answers. The same master-spirit of hell, who stood by the side of the yet innocent and unpolluted Eve, and whispered, "Ye shall not surely die," the same evil one cometh now, and taketh the Word out of men's hearts; and though we are told that he is a liar and a murderer from the beginning, multitudes follow after him, "as an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

SECTION LIII.

(Chapter ix. verse 24—34.)

THERE is a straightforward simplicity and earnestness in this poor man's reply which baffles all

the sophistry and virulence of those, who would extort from him an admission unfavourable to Jesus, it was, to all outward appearance, no equal contest in which these parties were engaged. On the one side was a poor blind beggar, blind from his very birth, without education and without means; on the other, the great council of the nation, the Pharisees in Sanhedrim assembled, with all the appliances of learning, station, public opinion, and legal authority. They had already evidenced the feelings by which they were actuated, and had intimated their full purpose that whosoever acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ should be put out of the synagogue; and, be it remembered, this was to Jewish feelings and Jewish prejudices no slight penalty, and was accompanied by no trifling detriment and privation. It in fact excluded a man from all national, legal, and personal rights, as well as any participation in religious ordinances. It has indeed often struck me that there is great similarity between the virulence of these Pharisees and the Roman Catholic priesthood in Ireland: the same aversion to the truth, the same substitution of violence and imprecation for argument and reasoning, the same readiness in the one to curse with bell and book, as in the other to excommunicate with sounded trumpet. These Pharisees too had already succeeded, by their threats, in intimidating the parents of this man, and they now make the attempt to extort an

admission from himself to the depreciation of his benefactor. It is evident that at this moment the man knew not Jesus as the Christ : as a prophet, as a worshipper, a devout and holy worshipper of God ; as one high in the favour of heaven, and whom God delighted to honour, he had already acknowledged and felt Him to be, but beyond that he knew nothing. The light of the natural sun had indeed gladdened his eyes, but the eyes of his understanding were not as yet enlightened to know the full hope of his calling, nor the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints ; and Jesus, as in the case of the poor cripple at Bethesda, had conveyed Himself away and had not as yet revealed Himself unto him. And yet it is remarkable with what clearness, as well as tenacity, this man lays hold of the truth and will not let it go. It was indeed the conviction, the certainty, the assurance of personal experience : "I was blind ; I now see." No reasoning, no authority could alter that fact, or convince him he had never been blind. "I was blind" was his avowal of his former melancholy condition ; "I now see" His grateful record of the mercy granted. "Give God the praise," say these Pharisees. Good counsel it was, and no doubt he followed it ; no doubt he recognized the love and the mighty power of God in the signal blessing bestowed upon him, and his heart gushed forth in grateful accents of praise ; but when *these Pharisees* added, as their own inference and

conclusion, "Give God the praise," *but*—give none to this man, for he is a sinner; his whole soul revolts at the idea, and his answer still recurs to his own individual experience, which nothing could shake, nothing could baffle. He in reality says, "Whatever *your* knowledge may be, I know nothing of the kind; but, one thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see." I believe true practical religion must be a religion of experiences, and very much in the same simple way, as in the case of this poor blind beggar. There is, first, the conviction of our own blindness and ignorance, the eyes of our understanding darkened, or so slightly opened, that we too see men as trees walking, the plainest truths through a dim and misty medium. We feel that we are groping our way, that we are walking in darkness and have no light; even the very lamp, the very light of the Word of God gives no ray, or so feeble a one, that we see not our course—and we sit down and beg, beg of Him who is the light of the world, and giveth light to all who ask—and Jesus passes by, and has compassion upon us, and we are perhaps sent by a way we know not, and by a path we do not understand, to some human earthly source of healing, some friend or minister; or, it may be, some Ananias sent of God, comes in at the moment of need, speaks a word in season, the scales fall from our eyes, and we see. Or like him who was pondering over and yet perplexing himself with the

roll of the prophet Isaiah,* till one, sent by the Spirit of God, joined himself to him, and preached Jesus unto him. Do you think that any one could have persuaded Saul that Jesus had not met him by the way,—had not sent Ananias to him, and that Ananias had never said in the name of Jesus, “Brother Saul, receive thy sight?” Or can we for a moment imagine, that, as that eunuch went on his way rejoicing, any one could have convinced him that that scene in the desert of Gaza had been but a delusion of his imagination, that no Philip had met him, sat by his side, and preached unto him Jesus. Every feeling of his gladdened heart would have risen up to give the lie to such a supposition; and so, however, the Pharisees tried, never could they have reasoned this poor beggar into the confession that he had never been blind, that Jesus had never sent him to the pool of Siloam, that he had not washed in its stream, and returned seeing, and that, as a necessary inference, if he had not been of God, He could have done nothing. And so it is with God’s dear children, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;” “and he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”


* Acts cviii. 30, 31.

SECTION LIV.

(Chapter ix. verse 35—38.)

WE now see the purpose as well as the truth of our Lord's remark to His disciples, when they asked Him the reason of this man's blindness; that it had been permitted in order that the works of God should be made manifest in him. And at the same time it teaches us a very valuable lesson, not to despise or depreciate the least or lowest of God's outcast ones. Few, if any, who had seen this poor blind beggar soliciting alms in the public streets of Jerusalem, would have looked upon him with any feelings higher than those of benevolence and pity, many would have passed him without a thought, and none would have guessed that beneath that beggar's garb, and that melancholy privation, so indicative, as it would seem to them, of heaven's wrath and not its love, there yet was one, an especial object of heaven's favour, one chosen of God and precious in His sight; a jewel in that Redeemer's crown, whom the proud Pharisees alike contemned, and rejected, and cast out as they did this object of His heavenly favour. When the Sanhedrim excommunicated him for his bold and grateful defence of his benefactor, it does not appear, as I have already said, that as yet he knew Jesus in His divine nature as the Son of

God. But shall any whom the Lord hath chosen ever finally perish? shall the truth be withholden from the honest and good heart, so ready to bear fruit an hundred fold? Jesus Himself sought the man, that as He had given natural light to the closed eye, so He might now give spiritual light to the veiled and darkened soul. There is very much in this brief interview, that reminds one of the meeting between the Saviour and the woman of Sychar. There are no doubt "diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; and differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all:" and yet here there would seem to have been not only the same gift, but almost the same administration, and the same operation: "I that speak unto thee, am He," the manifestation to the one:—"It is He that talketh with thee," the equally gracious declaration to the other. And yet in the case of this once-blind one, how far does his reception of the truth exceed that of the woman in alacrity and extent! "Is not this the Christ?" the almost hesitating enquiry of the one:—"Lord! I believe!" the instant burst of the undoubting faith of the other, followed too by an act of adoration and worship to Jesus, as his God and his Lord. Who does not now see how this man's blindness was overruled to the glory of God? Who will not acknowledge the truth of the Lord's declaration as most abundantly exemplified



in this poor beggar, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies have I gathered thee." And what a light, I would add, does the conclusion of this narrative throw on so many of the Lord's dealings and dispensations, at present so dark, so mysterious and unintelligible, so full of painful surmises, and apprehensions, and hard thoughts of that love which yet is over all His works. We do indeed see a vast amount of sorrow and suffering in the world; some who from their very cradle go mourning heavily, not only all the day, but all their days; some, whom what the world calls casualty or unforeseen accident consigns in the midst of their youth and strength to irrecoverable infirmity and helplessness; some too, whom the Lord seems in His overflowing love to shade and shelter beneath some spreading gourd of His own especial planting and growing, and yet, in the very midst of its growth, in the very beauty of its foliage, the same hand and the same love, that tended its growth, has prepared and sent the worm that causes it to wither as in a night; and at the moment, one can only gaze in silent anguish at the wreck, and feebly stammer forth, "What hath the Lord done? It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

The man of the world looks on and mourns, and perhaps arraigns, and murmurs; the child of God traces a Father's hand and a Father's love as much beneath a frowning, as a smiling providence;

and as he reads this 9th chapter of St. John's Gospel, it seems to throw such a holy and subdued light over even the most darkened dispensations, that the gracious promise of Jesus to Peter afterwards, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," seems almost anticipated. And though all the works of God may not be fully manifested, nor all the links of love distinctly traced, till that great day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, yet we know, and are sure from the Lord's own unerring word, that all things shall work together as well for our good, as for God's glory, to them that love God. And what more could a child wish than his own good, and his father's glory?


SECTION LV.

(Chapter ix. verse 39 to the end).

It was no doubt a melancholy case to be born blind; and yet one ought to be full of gratitude, that, amid the myriads who walk God's earth, it is only one here and there that is so heavily afflicted, that it is not so with ourselves, that we and the vast majority of mankind can engage in all the occupations and enjoyments of life, no infirmity hindering us. It is indeed a vast mercy, yet one little felt, while vouchsafed; its value is

chiefly known in its withdrawal. And when one considers by what a feeble tenure each sense is held, how liable every moment to derangement or decay, and how the most apparently trivial accident may lay the foundation of severe and life-long suffering and privation, I can only say that our daily thanksgivings for the daily return and continuance of these blessings should be far more fervent and more heartfelt than they are even with the most thankful. But our Lord in these few verses which I have just read, intimates, or at least leads our thoughts to, the much more severe affliction of spiritual blindness, and that not confined to one here and one there; to one in a city, or one in a street, or one in a house; but to all, to every living being, from him that sitteth on the throne to the captive in his dungeon, that is, through every grade of human being, from the highest to the lowest. It was not true of the Laodiceans alone, though addressed to them, but of every child of Adam, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, *and blind*, and naked." And yet there is not one, who, until taught of God, will recognize his own picture in these lineaments, though sketched and drawn by the unerring hand of the Holy Spirit. There is not one, who would not as eagerly, perhaps I might say as fiercely, resent such an imputation as these Pharisees did, and say, "Are we blind also?" Such is the difference, the essential difference between the two

blindnesses of the body and of the understanding ; in the case of the bodily blind, ask him in the words of Jesus, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" and he would instantly and passionately cry out, "Lord, that I may receive my sight;" or if Jesus appeared to pass him by unheeding, he would cry so much the more earnestly, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" And the reason is plain enough ; the sense of his calamity is ever present with him, he feels it in every waking hour, it hampers him in every pursuit, and is a perpetual clog in every step ; and though, no doubt, grace in the regenerate heart hushes every murmur, he never can forget that he *is* blind, far less ever believe or imagine that he sees. But it is very different with the spiritually blind ; they have no knowledge, no sense of their calamity ; though walking in bondage and darkness every hour, they say, like the Jews in the former chapter, "We were never in bondage to any;" or as these Pharisees here, "Are we blind also?" Our Lord does indeed here make a very important distinction between unavoidable and wilful ignorance ; and when He says, "For judgment I am come into this world," He seems to intimate that His coming would make the discrimination or line of separation between the two not only most clearly marked and defined, but in a great measure do away the very plea, which yet in mercy He suggests. There are no doubt those on whom the



light of God's Gospel has never yet shone; dark places of the earth, into which no ray of truth, no light of righteousness has ever penetrated; but it is not of them that Jesus so much speaks, (though His heart was even then yearning over them to do them good,) as He is alluding to a far more fearful case—to those who had light, and yet were in darkness; who had eyes, and saw not; and ears, and heard not; and who yet, in the very noonday light, with the sun of righteousness shining upon them in their very midst, closed their eyes against every beam, and were still crying out, "We see; we see," and therefore incurably and irrecoverably remaining in their sin. It is assuredly a very awful case, let us take especial care that it be not ours. I am afraid that spiritual blindness is a far more frequent malady in a Christian than even in a heathen land; at any rate, I am sure its sin is more aggravated, its ingratitude far deeper, and its responsibility and danger far more alarming. God forbid that I should undervalue Christian privileges, or say one word to lead you to suppose it were better to be without them; but still the mere possession of privileges without improvement of, or by them, is a most fearful risk. It is a most solemn word which St. John afterwards records from our Lord's own lips, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin;" and so here, "Ye say, we see, therefore your sin remaineth."

It is quite true, as Jesus said on another occasion, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" the man who thinks he sees, will never go to a Physician to recover him of his blindness; and he who, like the Pharisee in the parable, trusts in himself that he is righteous, and thanks God that he is not like other men; and especially if that self-conceit is backed by popular opinion and estimate of his pretensions, will be much more inclined to think and to say of himself, that he is "rich, and increased in goods, and has need of nothing," than to come in like the poor blind beggar of Jerusalem, having need of all things. Depend upon it, our most appropriate position is to "sit and beg;" or rather, to lie low in the dust, at the foot of Jesus' cross, with our hands upon our mouths; or if any word escape us, let it be the cry of him, whom the law bade to call out, "Unclean, unclean."

SECTION LVI.

(Chapter x. verse 1—10.)

THERE is in our Bibles a division here of another chapter, but I believe this to be a continuation of the same discourse which our Lord was holding in the preceding chapter respecting *the blind man*. Its tone of thought, and even

its very imagery of Himself as the good Shepherd, seem suggested by the circumstances that had just occurred ; and, we may add, the allusion made in the 21st verse by some of the Jews present, to the very miracle of opening the eyes of the blind, seems to put it beyond all doubt that it was either a continuance of the discourse, or so immediately in connexion with it that it may fairly be considered as one and the same. The Pharisees, at least those of them who composed the Sanhedrim or great council of the Jewish nation, had, you remember, excommunicated the poor blind beggar for his adherence to, and confession of, Christ. Our Lord here unhesitatingly affirms that He is the true door of the sheep-fold, and that the Pharisees who would excommunicate those who believed on Him were the thieves and spoilers of the fold. The language itself was too plain to be misunderstood ; but its application to themselves they did not understand, nor recognize themselves as false teachers of the people, who sought to lay burdens on others, which they themselves would not touch with one of their fingers. Jesus therefore again most emphatically and significantly repeats that He alone is the door, and that all who sought to enter in by other means of access, unauthorized and unsanctioned by the Master and owner of the fold, were only thieves and robbers, their motives worldly, their ends selfish, and the result only spoliation and plunder.

It is quite true there was a time when Jesus was not the door, nor the alone way of access into heaven. For a very brief period, man was entrusted with the privilege of working out his own salvation: "This do, and thou shalt live," was the precept and the promise—"Do that and thou shalt die," was the alternative and the sentence. We well know how fatally our first parents lost this privilege, how soon they sinned, and involved all their posterity in their sin also. From that hour that door of access to God was not only for ever barred and bolted, it was utterly removed, it was altogether closed up, never to be opened again for man's pathway into heaven. But at the same moment, and with the same voice that judgment was pronounced, mercy rejoiced against judgment: there was no doom passed upon the tree of life, "Cut it down;" cherubim indeed with flaming swords were placed to guard that sacramental tree, to intimate that the usual way of access to it was for ever done away, and that neither Adam nor any of his children could any longer approach it in their own innocence or righteousness. But a new and living way of access is now prepared, a new door is opened in heaven, not merely whose lintel and side-posts are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, but the way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh; Himself the way, Himself the door, and Himself the life. I am afraid that many a one has thought,

and still thinks, that the old door is not so thoroughly closed up, but that some exclusive ones may find their way in through their own works of righteousness that they have done: at any rate the Roman Catholic has built in, and opened, if we may so speak, in that wall which surrounds the enclosure of Christ's fold, a number of wicket-gates, through which she tells her votaries, they may with equal and indeed greater ease find their way to heaven; but not one of which leads or can lead into those pastures, where Christ's little flock is safely tended and sheltered. There is but one Door, one Way, one Mediator between God and man—one Atonement once made—one Sacrifice once offered—and it does seem a strange infatuation and blindness, that when we may have "boldness to enter even into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," poor, miserable, self-deluders should be found knocking at this and at that gate, through this penance, and that indulgence, by this saint and that intercessor, when Jesus so expressly says, "I am the Door; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me"—"By Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved"—"Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

A door, you know, serves two purposes,—to admit the welcome, but shut out the intruder: and we are expressly told that in that day of need, in that hour of terror and tribulation, many will

strive to enter in and shall not be able: many whose lamps are still untrimmed, and who are gone to buy oil elsewhere, will return too late and find the door shut; and when once shut, like that door that was closed in Paradise, it can never be opened again: there may be, nay, there will be we are told, weeping, and wailing, and many a loud and agonizing cry of "Lord! Lord! open unto us;" but to no purpose; for within, through that barred door, the voice of Him that closed it will answer, "Depart from Me ye wicked; I never knew you." And yet, blessed be God, though Jesus declares of Himself, that He is the Door, in another passage He describes Himself as standing at the door, and Himself knocking for admission; but that is a different door, the door of our hearts, and, alas! how long has the Lord stood there, and been repulsed. Even His own, His well-beloved, are sometimes slow to open: He stands calling to them in accents of tenderest affection, "Open to Me, My sister," and through sluggishness and indolence they are heedless of the voice, and would fain have "a little more sleep, a little more slumber," ere they are thoroughly awakened and alert, and the consequence even with them is, that when they do arise and open to their beloved, their beloved has withdrawn Himself—they seek Him, but they cannot find Him—they call Him, but He gives no answer, and were it not for the everlasting love wherewith He

loved them, they too would seek Him in vain for ever.

Is He a way? He leads to God,
The path is drawn in lines of blood;
There would I walk with hope and zeal,
Till I arrive at Zion's hill.

Is He a door? I'll enter in:
Behold the pastures fair and green!
A paradise divinely fair,
None but the sheep have freedom there.

SECTION LVII.

(Chapter x. verse 11—21).

Luke xiii. 22.

WE had, as you may remember, in the Gospel of St. Luke a most touching and exquisitely drawn picture of the love of God under the character of a shepherd seeking his one stray sheep. And yet beautiful as that parable was, it may have led us to look upon the Lord, as One caring most tenderly for the lost one of His flock, which is most true, but as One also caring comparatively little for those safe within the fold, which would be most untrue. And so here we have the blessed Jesus describing Himself under the character of the good shepherd, as anxiously and tenderly vigilant over the welfare of those sheep, who are safe within the shelter

and security of His pastures. There are no doubt stragglers—no doubt many, who have never as yet been reclaimed from their state of “wildness,” and are yet to be brought in; and Jesus here sweetly alludes to His purposes of mercy and love towards them: “other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” Here however He is mainly speaking of those who are His own, “the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand,” who know His voice and follow Him whithersoever He leadeth them.

I need not take up your time with describing an Oriental flock, so different in many respects from our own, and giving such appropriateness to the imagery here used. There is however one thing I would observe, and it is with reference to a remark I made on that parable in St. Luke’s Gospel, that Jesus is not here speaking of His fold in heaven, that “little flock” already gathered in and safe from every disaster. Those of whom the Saviour here speaks are still on earth, still in the wilderness, still exposed to the ravages of wild beasts, and the outrages of wilder men, and still too occasionally left to the care and tending of mercenary “hirelings,” whose own the sheep are not, and who regard their own wages more than the welfare of the flock. And yet with what unremitting vigilance does Jesus describe Himself as

watching over them, not only to do them good, but to keep them in all their ways. He is at their head, and they feel with David, "The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" They go in and out and find pasture, and their song still is, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." I dare not, alas! say even of all these, at all times, that none foolishly stray beyond the precincts of the fold, and as it were out of the reach of the shepherd's care, and that none come back wounded, and torn, and bleeding, and find to their sad cost that there is neither safety nor peace, nor pasture out of their shepherd's fold. There is too something most comforting in the assurance Jesus here gives that He knows all His sheep by their names. Zacchæus had found it so to his everlasting joy: "Zacchæus, make haste," was the call of the shepherd's voice to that stray one: and what a blessed comfort is this to many of the Lord's lowly ones on the earth, that however unknown, unrecognized, and passed by here, or it may be, their names cast out as evil, still the Lord not only knoweth them that are His, but knows them by name, even the meanest and the poorest; and not only calleth them by name as friend with friend or brother with brother, but registers every name in His own "book of remembrance."

I wish it were true with England's parochial folds, that their appointed shepherds could know all

their sheep by name: I wish our own land were so parcelled out, that every shepherd of each district should know not only by name, but by feature, and voice, and character, and disposition each one committed to his charge. I do not say that our Lord here distinctly means to intimate this to us, but I do think we may gather a very important rule from our guidance in this matter from what our Lord here significantly says. If there was that intimacy of acquaintance, that tie of personal knowledge, that means of access to each and all, that identity of interest in the well-being of all, we need fear no intruder, no stranger—they would not follow a stranger in preference to the voice they love so well: and I believe the great source of separation and dissent is that so many of our parochial folds have outgrown their shepherd's care and knowledge, and overwrought the limits of human strength: so that in many of our overgrown parishes neither the shepherd knows his sheep, nor the sheep their shepherd, not even by name.

One only wonders, as these Jews heard such words of love fall from the lips of Jesus, that there should have been any division of feeling or sentiment among them respecting Him; one would have expected rather, that, "as they heard the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth," they would with one heart and voice have burst forth into that prophetic acknowledgment of their

own sweet Psalmist, "Grace is poured into thy lips." And yet how painfully different the exclamation, "He hath a devil and is mad; why hear ye Him?" and even of those who upheld Him, how poor, how cold their defence, "These are not the words of one that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" As to this latter question, I do not know what power may be permitted to the devil to exercise, we know that he has been permitted to smite with sore disease; but I think the far more useful question would be, not "*Can* the devil," but "*will* the devil open the eyes of the blind?" He is the Prince of darkness, and for him to open the eyes of the blind, for him to unlock the eyes of the understanding, and pour in the light of spiritual day, would be about as suicidal and preposterous, as for Satan to drive out Satan. It is "because their deeds are evil" that sinners hate the light, and prefer to walk in darkness with him, for whom and for whose victims is "reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

SECTION LVIII.

(Chapter x. verse 22—30.)

It is said of a good man of old,* that, as he was commenting on the 8th chapter of the Romans, he

* Jacomb on Rom. viii. 1672.

broke forth into the exclamation, "Blessed be God for every part of Holy Writ, but especially for the 8th chapter of the Romans;" and so I would say, "Blessed be God for every verse of St. John's Gospel, but especially for the 28th and 29th verses of this chapter, which so emphatically and unmistakeably declare the final perseverance of the saints of God." Jesus is here speaking of His own, "The people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand," in contrast to those whom He disclaims as not of His sheep. It is of them that He here declares that He gives unto them eternal life. It is no future possession, no inheritance to be attained hereafter, no privilege that may by some misadventure be forfeited or lost; but it is a present gift, an immediate bestowal. "I give unto them"—even now, from henceforth they are citizens, and denizens, and possessors of heaven: it is theirs by inalienable right, it is theirs by royal gift, and secured by every attribute that surrounds the Godhead. They are even now on their journey heavenwards, on their way to that land of promise of which the earthly Canaan was so feeble a type; and though, like those earliest pilgrims of the desert, hindered and thwarted, though occasionally repulsed and driven back, and wandering for many a lengthened year amid the perils and privations of the wilderness—still eventually, in the Lord's own appointed time, and in fulfilment of the Lord's own especial promise, guided

by His pillar and upheld by His daily providence, they reached its confines, and entered in, and took possession. So like these hosts of Israel, the children of God have still a portion of the wilderness to cross: there are enemies to combat, difficulties to encounter, and obstacles to overcome; but none of these things move them, neither count they their mortal life dear unto them, for they are within sight, and bear with them the title deeds of their heavenly inheritance, sealed by the Spirit of God unto the day of redemption, and bearing this impression on the seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Can we suppose the armies of Israel, as they neared the promised land, to have looked back with regret and longing on the parched and arid wilderness, on the very borders of which they were standing? Would they pine for the manna, sweet and welcome as it had once been, to fall once more around the camp, when the clusters of Eshcol, and the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim were within their reach? Would they murmur at the drying up of the stream, that had miraculously quenched their thirst through the dreary steppes of the desert, when they saw the waters of Jordan rolling before their eyes? And will the Christian pilgrim, as he too draws near to the land afar off, and sees the King in His beauty, will he turn a backward lingering glance on the soiled and faded and sin-stained attractions of earth? Will he pine for the flesh-pots of Egypt and the joys of


earth, when the pleasures at God's right hand for evermore beckon him onwards? or will he desire to slake his thirst from the cisterns that hold no water, when the river, whose streams make glad the city of God, is within sight? No; "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, he presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And as the gates and walls of Jericho fell down before the trumpets of Israel, and gave them free access to the city, so will the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem open wide their everlasting portals to admit the once militant, but now triumphant warrior. He has finished his course, he has run his race, he has fought a good fight, and henceforth there is laid up for him that crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give him in that day of his victory: and as he enters through the gates into that heavenly city, he too takes up the song, which resounds through all her courts, "Not unto us; not unto us, O Lord; but unto Thy name be the praise and the glory ascribed." For has he stood by his own might, has his own right arm gotten him the victory? Can it be said to human warrior, "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, and in thy majesty ride prosperously, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things?" Far from it: as was said of the warriors of Israel, "They gat not the land in possession by their own

sword, neither did their own arm save them : but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance ;” so the Christian warrior, before and during the conflict, may sing, “ Through Thee will we push down our enemies, through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us ;” and when the battle is ended, and the triumph won, there is still the same acknowledgment, “ Thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put to shame them that hated us.” It is in very weakness that the Christian warrior’s strength lies, his weapons are not carnal weapons, in himself he is never more than the stripling with sling and stone against his giant foes. The very word of Jesus implies the nature of his qualification and his tenure : “ I *give* unto them ;” it is no purchase, no acquisition by conquest or by labour, no inheritance from another’s toil ; it is the gift of God, the free gift of Him that hath eternal life to give. And how is it secured ? It is true that only one of all those attributes, which surround the throne of God, is here mentioned, the power of God ; but what does not that imply ? what does not that involve ? what does not that secure and make fast for ever ? Our translation indeed somewhat narrows and limits it by its addition of “ no *man* ;” but there is no such limitation in the original—it is “ no one,” no one being, no one thing ; neither wolf, nor lion, nor wild beast ; neither man, nor devil, nor foe, nor hindrance, nor

trial of any kind. It is the triumphant enumeration of the apostle's language, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" who shall "pluck us out of His hand?" "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our "Lord," or "pluck us out of His Father's hand."

SECTION LIX.

(Chapter x. verse 31 to the end.)

THE Jews were quick enough to understand Jesus when it suited their purpose to do so, though so dull and slow to comprehend the truth when it made against them, or counteracted their wishes. Our blessed Lord had in the preceding verse declared the unity not only of will and purpose, of majesty and power, but of essence and of being, between Himself and the Father. "I and my Father are one." It was a declaration, for which, if made by mere man, the Jews might well stone Him; if it was the language of any created being; of any but the uncreated God, it was indeed, as the Jews pronounced it, unmitigated blasphemy. We have therefore reason to be thankful to these a, though they meant it not, for letting us see

and know in what sense they, who heard, interpreted these words of Christ. Be it true, as we believe and are sure, or be it untrue, as these Jews alleged, still the claim advanced by Jesus, and understood, nay, and acted upon by these bystanders as so put forth, was, that "such as the Father is, such is the Son;" and that "as the Father is God, so the Son is God, co-equal and co-eternal together." It is indeed the key-stone of the Christian arch, that Jesus Christ is perfect God, as well as perfect Man. Take away the Godhead, and no sufficient atonement has been made; but, "Lo, I come," saith He that is from everlasting: take away the manhood, and we have not only no longer a High Priest that can be touched with a sense of our infirmities, but no sacrifice of man's guilty race, Himself without sin, whose victim-blood could cleanse from all sin.

It is not, however, so much to this point, vital as it is, that I would now speak; I think there is a lesson equally valuable, which we may deduce from our Lord's word, and which I suspect we are all more or less practically liable to forget. It is true, we do not deny, but confess, (and blessed be the Holy Spirit that He hath revealed so distinctly this precious inestimable truth to us,) "that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father," that "He is over all, God blessed for evermore;" but do we practically carry this truth, that He and His Father are one—into our prayers—and make

it the foundation of all our confidence? There are those, who, if you ask them the ground of their hope, will reply that God is merciful, meaning God the Father; and so no doubt He is, abundant in mercy, "keeping mercy for thousands;" but why, and on what grounds is God merciful to the sinner? Not because His mercy is the only attribute in exercise when He looks upon the sinner; not because He lays aside His other attributes of truth and justice, and allows mercy sole and unrestricted sway. No! it is because His justice has been already satisfied in the payment of Him, who is at God's right hand; it is because His truth has been already vindicated in the vicarious suffering of Him who died, the just for the unjust; and thus it is that the glorious declaration is verified, that "God can be just and yet be the justifier of him who believeth on Jesus." Again, (and this I think is the more frequent omission even with God's own children,) we so love to dwell on the perfect work of Jesus, on the love of Jesus, on His compassion for poor sinners, on all that He has done and suffered, that we are apt to rest there, and not carry on our equally grateful thoughts to Him, "who so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is indeed a true saying, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" but it is equally true, as Jesus Himself here asserts, that "Him

hath the Father sanctified, and sent into the world.”

It was not long before, that these infatuated Jews had sought to stone Jesus for asserting His pre-existence from all eternity; and now they once more lift their guilty hands for the same murderous purpose. And yet with what calm and undisturbed demeanour does Jesus reason with them! He makes no effort to escape, he exerts no visible miracle to restrain their malice; and yet it was in reality as great an act of Almighty power that thus stayed their purpose, as when in the streets of Sodom, He smote the murderous multitude with blindness; or when at the prayer of His prophet He blinded the eyes of that Syrian host who sought that prophet's life. “Many good works have I showed you from my Father;” here again, uniting Himself with the Father in all His works of love, and miracles of mercy: “For which of these do ye stone Me?” One would have thought the appeal would have been irresistible, that the very stones would have dropped from their hands. But it was not so; and He still calmly reasons with them, bringing evidence even from their own Scripture, that if the inspired writer of the 82nd Psalm deemed it no blasphemy to say of those, whom God, in times of old, had appointed His judges and vicegerents on earth, that they were “gods, and children of the Most High,” though doomed like other men to die;

surely it were no blasphemy to call "Him, who is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords," the Son of God. Even some among themselves had asked, "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" It was therefore an irresistible inference, "Though ye believe not Me, believe the works." And yet how vain! "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet, saying, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed: lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

SECTION LX.

(Chapter xi. verse 1—6.)

THE whole of this chapter of St. John's Gospel relating to the sickness, death, and resurrection of Lazarus is so full of interest, it comes so home to the business and bosom of every being, that one does not wonder that it has enlisted the sympathies of every Christian reader. It is so full of instruction and consolation, that, amid its abundance, one hardly knows which to select first. Whether it is that it exhibits to us the blessed


Saviour as more especially interested in human feelings, as giving way more unreservedly to human affections, and, as it were, bringing Him more vividly into contact with human sympathies in the hour of nature's deepest suffering and anguish, whatever be the feeling uppermost in our hearts, one cannot but acknowledge a peculiar interest as we read this narrative of the family at Bethany. The family at Bethany! Who has not heard of the two loving, tender-hearted sisters, and of their brother Lazarus? Where has the Gospel been read and preached, that the love and piety of these three has not been told for a memorial of them? Who has not pictured to himself that holy home, where these three, united by such ties of kindred, were still more closely bound by the bonds of love to one common object, the object of their deepest and undivided love? Who has not at times sketched before his mind's eye that happy family, centring in themselves, and in one other object of love, all the affections, interests, and happiness of their lives? How calmly and peacefully would those lives glide onwards in the humble solitude of their village home, broken only by an occasional visit from the friend they loved, the Saviour they adored. That friend however, as this narrative opens upon us, was now far away in Galilee; and sickness is permitted, nay, I should rather say, commissioned, to enter the abode of these friends of the Saviour. It was

the brother, the only brother as it would seem, Lazarus, who was sick: had it been one of the affectionate sisters, it would still have been a heart-wounding blow to the survivors; but it was their only brother Lazarus who was sick, and these tenderly-attached sisters, as they watched the increasing malady, must have thought with grateful adoration of Him, though absent, who so loved their brother, and whom they had but to summon to his side, and all would be well. The messenger accordingly is dispatched; and how simply touching the message, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." No entreaty that Jesus would come and heal him—no intimation even to speak a word only, and their brother should be healed. It was enough to cast their care upon Jesus, as confident in His love and readiness, as in His power to aid. I dare not however claim for these sisters, not even for her who had chosen the better part, and had sat at the feet of Jesus, that higher faith which *left* all with Jesus, which not only takes its sorrows and its cares to God, but *leaves* them with Him to deal with them as He thinks best, to remove, or at least to lighten, or to continue them and vouchsafe strength according to the need. I do not think they contemplated for a moment refusal, nor even delay; and as they sate by the side of the dying one, they must have counted with agonized impatience every moment, till Jesus should appear; and it may be at the last,

in the very sickness of their own hearts at hope so long delayed, may have suffered themselves to question the sincerity of the love wherewith Jesus loved them. One can imagine them giving utterance to their thoughts, each to each, "Oh! that He were here!" "If He were here, our brother would not die." Like the mother of Sisera, they might have looked out at the window, and cried through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" wondering that He came not, and suggesting every possible reason for disappointment or delay, except the true one. And death at last came, but no Jesus: and the day of burial too came, that last sad day of final wrench and separation, but still no Jesus, no message from Him, no tidings of Him. Friends and relatives flocked around them from Jerusalem and elsewhere, to comfort, and to weep with them; but He whom their souls longed for came not. The last sad rites were over—the stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre, and its inmate left to his long rest—and as they turned back to their now desolate home, they must have felt that they had parted with their brother for ever on this earth. And where was Jesus? Had not the messenger reached Him? Had He set forth to hasten to these sorrowing and suffering loved ones, and was He hurrying onwards lest He should be too late on His errand of love and mercy? Nothing of the kind: all that

we are told at this period of the narrative is, that when the message had reached Him, when He heard that he whom He loved was sick, and, as a natural inference, desired to see Him, "He abode two days still in the same place where He was," without an effort to reach him, or even a message of comfort to the loved ones at Bethany. It is true, in the present history the veil is taken from our eyes, we are admitted as it were within the veil, and we know the inmost workings of the heart of Jesus: and while the sisters at Bethany perhaps thought that He had forgotten them, we know that it was not so, and that there was love, and tenderness, and human sympathy blended with divine wisdom and heavenly purposes of mercy to far more than Lazarus, or Martha, or Mary, even while He seemed to be indifferent and unheeding.

And, in many a case of our own sorrows and trials, *what* He does, we know not now; *why* He does, we understand not now; we call, but He seems not to hear; we send messenger after messenger, prayer after prayer, and impatiently await the answer, which cometh not. The winds arise, wave after wave goes over us, and the vessel seems as though it must be overwhelmed in the stormy waters; and is Jesus asleep, as He was on the sea of Galilee? Is there no thought, no care for those toiling by His side, for those sorrowing on earth, even though He apparently hides His face, and



answers not? Jesus tarrying two whole days in Galilee, while Lazarus was sick unto death at Bethany, was no indication of lessened love, or of limited power. Had He spoken, or sent a message to that chamber of death, it might have been as He said by His Holy Spirit to one of old, "Be still, and know that I am God."

SECTION LXI.

(Chapter xi. verse 7—10.)

WE left Jesus still tarrying in Galilee after He had received the message from the affectionate sisters of the sickness and danger of their brother Lazarus. At the close of the second day, when He was Himself fully aware how that sickness had ended, and that Lazarus was already dead, He intimates to His disciples His purpose to return again into Judæa; and it is worth noticing with what condescension He associates His disciples with Himself in every movement, and puts them, as it were, almost on a footing of equality as friends, if not as counsellors in His plans: "Let us go again into Judæa;" as if submitting the matter to their judgment. And how blessed in all our undertakings to feel that they are such, as we can look to the holy Saviour to be with, and co-

operate with us in them; to rest assured that whatever we do, or wherever we go, in all our toils and duties, in all our pleasures and recreations, in all our journeyings and wanderings, Jesus is as it were walking with us side by side, and that if a moment of perplexity or emergency arise, we can at once turn to Him for counsel and guidance.

I am afraid in many of the world's pleasures and pursuits, it would be felt as an encumbrance and a hindrance to realize that Jesus was at their side, and noting every step. And yet it is the only safe rule: there are those, who wish to walk in some path, but yet are doubtful of its prudence and propriety;—and there are those who would rather, like our Lord's disciples here, not walk where yet duty seems to call them. On the one side they hear a voice saying, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good;" and on the other side another voice calling, "Cast in thy lot among us:" and if they follow the guidance of their own inclinations, they will inevitably err. As I said, it is the only safe rule of judgment, as to the world's pleasures and invitations; if you can ask Jesus to walk with you in the way you would go, if you can feel that His eye over you will be a comfort as well as a guide, go without scruple and without hesitation: you are quite safe. It is said of that man of God, Romaine, that when once solicited to join in some frivolous amusement, his reply

was, "If you will let me first kneel down with you in prayer, and beg for God's blessing, and God's presence in the work, I will readily join with you."

These disciples did not, as yet, realize the privilege, or the blessing and protection of the Saviour's presence; for to our Lord's communication of His purpose, they reply as if to deprecate and dissuade Him from it, as entailing danger on Himself. It is very difficult to analyse honestly and faithfully all the motives of our conduct. I do not know any one act of our life, that requires more grace, more prayer for guidance, or that needs the strong light and lamp of God's Word, and the enlightening grace of His Holy Spirit to enable us to search into the more secret recesses of our hearts, and lay the finger at once on that plague-spot of all our hearts, *selfishness*. To all outward appearance it was a generous regard for their Master's safety that dictated these words of the disciples; they would not have Jesus expose Himself again to a danger from which He had so recently escaped. And yet one cannot but feel that they must have been conscious that their own safety was as much imperilled in Judea as that of their Master, and that to urge Him to provide for His own safety, was in fact to provide for their's also. Our Lord in His reply alludes not to these less prominent motives; they were perhaps little conscious of them themselves, and might have resented, or

been hurt at an imputation of selfishness, and He therefore tenderly "upbraideth not." But He takes advantage of their remonstrance to enforce a most valuable and instructive counsel, applicable indeed to those to whom He addressed it, but as equally applying to you, and to me, and to every living being; and urging upon us the necessity of fervency and zeal in our appointed work of life, by the consideration of the shortness of the period allotted to every man to work the works of Him that sent him into the world. Our Lord was perfectly intelligible to Jewish hearers, when He said there were but twelve hours in the day; and if I were to add that we know not that there will be to us even the twelve hours, it would be as solemn and important a truth. The days of man, it is true, are three-score and ten years, and many a one in these days reaches even the four-score; but we need not search the registers of mortality to be informed that by far the greater part reach neither. And even of the span allotted to each, how large a portion is passed in the helplessness of infancy, the ignorance of childhood, the false romance of youth, and the cares and anxieties of maturer years. How much even of the day is dark, and spent in darkness! and unless therefore a man walks in the light of life with the full purpose of doing the work assigned him, he will, to his dismay, find himself overtaken by the shades of evening and the darkness of night; his feet will stumble on the

dark mountains, or as he gropes his unaided way through the dark valley and shadow of death. The simple purport of what our Lord says here, is very much the same as when, in answer to a somewhat similar warning of intended violence from Herod, He replied, "Go, tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the day following." And it conveys to us a very consolatory assurance, that, while engaged in God's work, and till God's work be done, we are safe from all the efforts and designs of hostile men. They may persecute, but they cannot destroy; God will send His angel, or His earthquake, or any other agent, and deliver His servant out of the hands of their enemies, and "out of the mouth of the lion."

SECTION LXII.

(Chapter xi. verse 11—16.)

I do not know any passage in Scripture, which so touchingly and feelingly intimates the union that exists between Christ and a believer, as the expression here, "Our friend Lazarus." We are indeed told of Jesus, that He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother; that Abraham was

called the friend of God, and that God spake to Moses face to face as a man to his friend ; and most consolatory and tender are such expressions ; but here we have Jesus Himself, in His human form, with human feelings, and human affections, speaking of Lazarus as united to Him in the closest bonds of intimate union and fellowship ; and not only so, but evidencing how sympathetically the link that binds a believer to Jesus runs through every member of the body ; and that, as the apostle afterwards expresses it, "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." "*Our friend Lazarus ;*" not merely My friend, but through Me united with yourselves, in the same equally close and tender bonds of fellowship. One longs indeed to realize more thoroughly this beautiful truth, so appropriately inserted in our creed, as one of the Articles of our Belief—the Communion of Saints ; and so sweetly shadowed forth in that prayer of Jesus on behalf of His disciples, "that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us ;" in the same intimacy and closeness of union which the Father has with the Son, and the Son has with the Father : "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfect in one." And as this same apostle writes, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and the Son ;" and, like the holy oil on the head of Aaron, it descends down to the skirts of his clothing, even to the lowest and the weakest

member. I wish this were more realized in Christ's Church militant here on earth; and that, engaged as they are in warfare with such fearful enemies within and without, they would cease to have strife one with another, and would listen to that remonstrance of peace which would remind them, "Sirs, ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one to another;" or that injunction which would dismiss them on their journey homewards with the salutary caution, "See that ye fall not out by the way."

The words of Jesus too assuredly intimate a more indissoluble and extended union than the mere narrow limits of this life. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." It is of Lazarus already dead that Jesus here speaks: of Lazarus probably already in his grave, and beginning to see corruption; and yet Jesus calls him, "our friend." The tie was not broken, the union not dissolved, the link still unsevered that bound Jesus and His disciples, living members on this earth, with their friend Lazarus in his grave. But how sweetly does Jesus rob death of its repulsiveness; how consolingly does He turn its more abhorrent and loathsome features into an image of peace, and beauty, and of calm repose. "By this time he stinketh," is nature's description of the departed one, even from a sister's lips: "He sleepeth" is the Saviour's expression. He had used the same image before, as regarded the ruler's daughter, "She is not dead, but sleepeth;" but I am not meaning

to assert that Jesus was the first that used this image; far from it; it was a frequent one even among heathen writers, who knew nothing of a resurrection, nothing of an awakening, or of a Saviour's call to the slumbering dust to come forth from the grave. With them it was the mere poetry of feeling; or, to speak more truly, nature's shrinking from that portraiture of death, which invests it only with repulsiveness and horror. It was Christ alone that could really give this character to death, and assure us that He will awake out of sleep not Lazarus alone, but the sisters of Lazarus also; nay, and all his brothers and sisters through every generation, in every land, that sleep in Him. I never stand by the grave-side of those who have died in Jesus, and see the unconscious tenant lowered, it may be by unheeding hands, into that narrow bed, but I long to tell to those standing around, how Jesus will one day come and awake His friend and their friend out of that sleep, and bid them comfort one another with these words.*

I fear that our Lord's disciples did not realize, as assuredly they did not understand, the full

* We have made an effort to alter the name with the locality of our burying-places; but though we have approached very near to the Christian's image of sleep in our name of "Cemetery," which is literally "a sleeping-place," it is still too little of a household word, and far too disguised in its obsolete garb for its meaning to be thoroughly known and appreciated.

meaning of their Master's words ; there was still the taint of cowardice and selfishness adhering to them ; and though one perhaps cannot but wonder at their giving a literal interpretation to the words of Jesus, yet one is not surprized that, feeling as they did, they gladly availed themselves of their mistake, and under the plea of kindness to their friend, would have evaded, both for their Master and themselves, the risk and the danger they dreaded. We should be very jealous of a suggestion, that would lead us to shrink from risk in the way of kindness or duty, and that would counsel the easier part of remaining quiet, than to be up and doing in the Lord's work. It is true that Thomas seems to repudiate the timid counsels of his brethren, and would urge them to accompany their Master, even though it should be to torture and to death ; but I am not quite sure that we read Thomas' words aright, and that, as has been suggested by many a commentator, instead of the affectionate zeal and ready promptitude to accompany his Master on a perilous mission, we should rather read them as a remonstrance against the measure, and an intimation, that whatever might be their Master's purpose, it was in no degree incumbent on them to share so needless a peril. " Are we also going that we may die with Him ?" I do not think, that till their Master's own resurrection was firmly established in their minds, nor till the pouring out of the Holy Spirit,

that any of His disciples threw off altogether that cowardice which assuredly clung to them during His personal ministry and life. "Master! carest Thou not that we perish?" was their rude remonstrance in the storm. "That be far from Thee!" the reply of one to the intimation of that Master's sufferings. "I know not the man." "They all forsook Him and fled." Be this however as it may, with regard to Thomas here, there seems to be peculiar appropriateness in the Saviour's standing foremost and alone in all these feelings of human sympathy and love; that as He was undoubtedly excellent in majesty and power, so should He be excellent in love and goodness.

SECTION LXIII.

(Chapter xi. verse 17—32.)

THIS is the third miracle of raising the dead, which Jesus performed on earth. The first instance was the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, who had but just expired ere Jesus entered the house. Death had but for a brief moment held her within his grasp, ere at the voice of Omnipotence he gave back his prey. The second case was the son of the widowed mother at Nain; he was being carried forth to his burial, and death had retained that victim for a somewhat longer

period; yet the same voice that said, "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise," said also with equal power, and the same result, "Young man, I say unto thee (also) arise;" and he that was dead, sat up. In the present instance, death had had dominion for a longer period, and in that hot and Eastern clime corruption and decay had already begun its obliterating work. And yet during the whole period Jesus had been absent: the time of sickness passed on, the hour of death had arrived, and the messenger of these mourning sisters had brought back no tidings of comfort, save the ambiguous assurance that their brother's sickness was not unto death, and which, in the sense they understood it, they had so painfully seen falsified. Jesus still lingered, still came not; the house of mourning was visited by other comforters; but He, whom they most desired, was not among the number. The day of burial too arrived, but still Jesus came not, nor any tidings from Him; and in hopeless sorrow, the friend whom Jesus loved, and whose sisters He loved also, and in whose house He had been so often an honoured and a welcome guest, was committed to the grave, and left a prey to corruption! Oh! what a heavy burden was here laid upon faith! what an overwhelming demand on the exercise of trust in God! and how in the time of their deep sorrow does it appear to have given way, at least as to any restoration of their brother!

It was indeed far beyond man's extremity:

man's extremity had been witnessed in that dying chamber, when the damps of death were on the brow, and the last pulse beat, and the spirit returned to God who gave it. But God's opportunity is not bounded nor narrowed by any human barriers or hindrance: these sad and sorrowing sisters indeed would have "limited the Holy One of Israel." "Lord! *if* Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," was the agonizing expression almost of reproach, with which each sister in succession greeted Jesus when He did come; as no doubt many and many a time during their sad watchings at his side they had uttered it to each other, "Oh that He were here! Oh that He would but come!" "If Thou hadst been here,"—it was, if I may so speak, but the narrow faith of Jewish unbelief. "Sir! come down ere my child die!" had been the cry of one under somewhat similar circumstances;—"speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," was the triumphant confidence of another. And yet there was faith in these sisters, though but as a grain of mustard seed at first; yet with what rapid, what almost instant growth does it spring up under the fostering teaching of the Lord! He would not quench the smoking flax that just gave evidence of fire, though not as yet kindled into flame, but with one breath, as it were, of his mouth fans it, and, like as on Jehovah's altar on Mount Carmel, fire from out of heaven, from the Holy Spirit, descended,

and consumed every fragment of unbelief. And with what triple reiteration does Martha enumerate the predicted claims and titles of Him who had uttered such glorious truths, to be indeed the Saviour of the world. "Thou art the Christ." "Thou art the Son of God." "Thou art He that should come into the world."

There are none perhaps among ourselves, there are very few anywhere, who have not followed some loved one to the grave; and I cannot conceive a more sublime commencement of that most solemn service, the Burial-service of our Church, than these words of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me shall never die." It is true that he, of whose blessedness they tell, hears them not: on his dulled and deadened ear, not a word falls; but they are not meant for him, he has already realized their truth and preciousness, he is already with Jesus; the spirit of him we mourn over has entered paradise, and for himself, and with his own eyes he has seen his Redeemer. With Job, he "knows that his Redeemer liveth, and though worms will destroy his body," yet hereafter in that risen flesh he shall behold Him face to face. But the living need the assurance, and how consolingly does it reach the sorrowing heart, that Jesus is "the resurrection and the life:" and though we are com-

mitting the lifeless body to its native dust, and we know that, like that of Lazarus, it will see corruption, yet these glorious words, as they assured her to whom they were spoken, that her brother should rise again, so they assure every mourner over those that die in the Lord, that though they be dead, yet shall they live, and that we have no need to sorrow as men without hope. The grave indeed seems to have its triumph; death, we cannot deny it, has a sting that fearfully lacerates the survivors' hearts; but still faith can say to each, "Oh death! where is thy sting? Oh grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

SECTION LXIV.

(Chapter xi. verse 33, 34.)

WE may perhaps be inclined to ask in the sceptic spirit of these Jews, Could not this man, who, in His distant abode of Galilee, knew of the death of Lazarus, and announced that event to His disciples, could not He by His own Spirit have known where his grave was, and not have needed to ask his sorrowing relatives his place of burial? Undoubtedly He could. He who had assuredly walked with Lazarus through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and who, though

He abode still in Galilee, had by His Spirit been present in that sick chamber at Bethany, and who by the same Spirit had, though unknown and unseen by them, accompanied these sisters on their last errand of love, could not but know where his earthly remains lay. And oh! what an insight into the dealings of the Lord's unutterable tenderness and sympathy does this reflection give us! These sisters thought Him absent, they all but deemed Him unkind and indifferent to those He loved: but was it so? Far from it: Jesus was with them during the whole season of their sorrow, and though *they* saw and knew Him not, yet one cannot doubt that in those hours of weakness, when perhaps voice and human consciousness had failed, Lazarus recognized the presence of his Saviour, felt Him a present help, felt His everlasting arms beneath him; and while perhaps his blinded sisters, blinded through their grief and tears, were sobbing forth "Oh that He were here!" the scales were already taken from their brother's eyes, and he saw Him he loved, and who so loved him, and committed his departing spirit into His hands.

The enquiry, therefore, of Jesus, "Where have ye laid him?" as has been well observed, was one, not of ignorance, but of wisdom; not of curiosity, but of tenderness and love, as well as prudence and precaution, lest those who had not scrupled to impute many of His miracles to collusion with

the evil one, should in this instance dare to insinuate that there was an understanding or collusion in the matter between Himself and the family of Lazarus. I am inclined to think, too—at least I love to think so—that Jesus here, in the tenderness of His heart to our bruised and crushed affections in such seasons of bereavement, meant, by His inquiry, to shew that He felt an interest and a sympathy in the last resting-places of His people; that He has not left their remains to moulder uncared for in their dark and solemn chamber; but that He inquires, as it were, for the grave, finds where it is, and watches over that undistinguished dust till the appointed hour when the same voice that thrilled through the grave of Lazarus shall sound through every sepulchre, and the dead in Christ shall come forth. I know there are some hard, and callous, and unfeeling hearts, who think it not simply a matter of indifference, which perhaps it may be, but a mark of an enlightened spirit, and of one free from superstitious usages, to be altogether regardless of the spot where our bodies lie; but it was a more than natural feeling which made Jacob so earnest on *his* death-bed to be buried in his father's grave. It was no superstitious feeling that made Joseph bind the children of Israel by an oath that they would preserve his remains, and carry up his bones with them when they quitted Egypt. It might have been natural feeling, and natural feeling


alone, which led the aged Barzillai, in the days of David, when the king would have had him accompany him to Jerusalem, to decline the kindness, and request permission to remain and die in his own city, and be buried by the grave of his father and his mother. This, I say, might have been natural feeling alone ; but I suspect few of us can read or hear its touching appeal without recognizing a corresponding emotion in our own hearts that tells us it is our own longing, our own desire. And it may be, when some wandering one, some exhausted missionary dies in a far distant land, though he dies in Jesus, and may have no bands in his death, yet if one earthly feeling still linger, it is perhaps as he thinks of those whom he loved at home, but whom he shall see no more in the flesh ; it is that even his dust is separated from theirs, and will not mingle with that of his family and kindred. We are all, perhaps, too apt to look with indifference on the earthly resting-places of those who have gone before us : for a time, indeed, in the first burst of sorrow, in the earliest outgushing of feeling, there is no doubt an anxiety about the spot where the remains of those we love lie. Some mother, like Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, may have watched over the yet unburied body of her child ; or, like these sorrowing sisters, often “ go to the grave to weep there ;” but that fond heart is itself soon stilled in death, and then few care to remember or to heed the resting-places

of the departed ; yet there is something most consolatory in the belief which this portion of the narrative assuredly suggests, whether as regards our own dust, or the dust of kindred, that vile and dishonoured as it is, and neglected as it may be, it is still dear to Jesus, and that He will Himself, ere long, re-collect every scattered grain, that it may be “fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.”

SECTION LXV.

(Chapter xi. verse 35—37.)

“JESUS wept.” There never were, perhaps, two simple words so expressive of meaning, so pregnant with truth, so indicative of all that is tender, and affectionate, and human ; and yet at the same time, while full of sympathy for the sorrowing and bereaved, as full also of awful pity for the impenitent and unbelieving. I can well believe that the human heart of the compassionate Redeemer was melted at the sight of human sorrow in its hour of bitterest trial ; and I love to think of Jesus blending His tears with those of the mourners, and giving His blessed sanction to an indulged sorrow, and embalming, as it were, the tears we shed over our own departed loved



ones, and mingling his own with them. I love to think of Jesus standing by the side of Lazarus' grave, and weeping as He gazed. We read indeed that in all our afflictions He is Himself afflicted, but here we see it in reality : Jesus Himself takes His stand as a mourner by a friend's grave, and disdains not to weep as other mourners were weeping. But still there was something far beyond all this in these tears of the Saviour. Were they tears of sympathy alone ? Did He weep only with them that wept ? Oh, no ! for them He knew that He had words of comfort ; He knew that in a few moments their sorrow would be turned into joy, and that those saddened sisters, who now stood by His side weeping, would, like the laden harvest-man, doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing their brother with them. He might, therefore, have well used, though in a different spirit, the words of His own prophet, when He bade him say, " Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him." But were there none standing by to whom even this stupendous miracle would be in vain ? to whom even this evidence of Omnipotence and Godhead would appeal to no purpose ? Were there none in that guilty city close by who would grasp at the very miracle itself to further their own hellish purposes, and seek to crush its proof, not only by the death of him whom He was about to raise, but of Himself also. Did not Jesus know, and feel sorrow of heart indeed for that hardened infidelity,

which, in the very blaze of noonday, would deny the sun. Though I do not therefore deny that this sorrow of Jesus was real human sympathy for the friends He loved, yet I can well believe that He who wept over Jerusalem in all her splendour and glory, because she knew not the things belonging to her peace, even now in part wept at that hardness of heart which He well knew would convert even this miracle of love He was about to perform into aggravated sin, and that the very evidence of Almighty power He was about to give would but tend to hasten and seal the doom of that guilty city. The union, indeed, of these blended feelings is to me most awful, and I could almost say with David of old, "Mine eyes gush out with tears, because men keep not thy law." The very tenderness that Jesus feels, the very sympathy that He is ever ready to bestow on the suffering and the sorrowful, the yearnings of affection with which He is ready to go forth to meet and welcome the returning penitent, the broken-hearted and the contrite, only evidence how hardened must the heart of that sinner be which thrusts aside all this compassion and love, and disregards, if it does not despise, that long suffering which would win him to the Saviour's side. Jesus indeed is all merciful; but there is a time, both with nations as with individuals, when mercy shall no longer plead with judgment. Though the patience of God be lasting, yet it is not everlasting.

We may well say with these Jews, "Behold how He loved Him!" and not Lazarus only, but "Behold how He loveth us!" "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," and Jesus so loved the world that He consented—nay, He freely offered Himself as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, took our nature upon Him, and "was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted." The prophet, indeed, has said of Him, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses," and we may truly add, "and wept with them that wept;" yet He that wept over the grave of another forbade any tears to be shed for Himself. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves." Alas! we have need indeed to weep for ourselves. Life has many sorrows, and still more of sins to weep over; but they are blessed tears that we weep with Jesus, and for Jesus. One, indeed, said of himself, that "his tears had been his meat day and night;" but those tears were like those which Jesus shed here, partly over the sorrows of his own heart, and partly over the sins of those around him; and of such tears I believe we may truly say, that God keepeth them all in His bottle. I do not think that when we reach that home, where tears will be no more, and God shall wipe them all away from our eyes, as we look back upon the past, we shall find that we have shed one tear too many, especially of those which fall for our own or others

sins. There is even in our most heart-wrung sorrow for our own trials and bereavements something of earth's taint about it; something of that selfishness which dims all human tears, save those which Jesus shed; and even of those which fall from us in the gushing forth of a broken and a contrite heart, they, too, are stained and earth-soiled; and, as has been truly said, "our very repentance needeth to be repented of."* "The very tears of the purest repentance, unless they be sprinkled with the blood of Christ, are impure: all our washings without this are but washings of the Ethiopian—it is labour in vain."† In heaven there will be no sin, no separation, and therefore neither sighing, nor sorrow, nor tears.

SECTION LXVI.

(Chapter xi. verse 38—46.)

THIS portion of the chapter furnishes us with the clue to all that was at first mysterious, and apparently unkind, in the conduct of our blessed Lord as regards this family of mourning ones, and not only them, but every sorrowing one of His extended family. We knew, indeed, from the first why Jesus tarried in Galilee, we knew the

* Bishop Beveridge.

† Archbishop Leighton.

purport of His words, when He sent back for answer that the sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby ; we knew every detail, and item as it were, of his sickness, and that, humanly speaking, it was unto death. But we knew also, what these sisters had not heard, that when Jesus announced his death only, He added, "But I go that I may awake Him out of sleep ;" and in prosecution of this purpose of mercy, we have accompanied Him step by step on His road to Bethany ; have witnessed His interview with the weeping sisters, have seen His own tears mingled with theirs, and now are permitted to stand with Him and them at the tomb of him, whom the Lord had declared that He had come to "awake him out of sleep," to break the deep slumber of that grave. It is true neither Martha nor Mary had heard the words, "I go to awake him out of sleep ;" but Martha had heard the still more emphatic promise, "Thy brother shall rise again ;" and that blessed comment on the words from the Saviour's own lips, "I am the Resurrection and the Life ; who-soever believeth on Me shall live, though he die." And though there appears to have been but little that passed between the more meditative sister, Mary, and Jesus, yet I cannot but believe that she who had sat at the feet of Jesus, and been taught of Him, had drank in too much of His Spirit to question either the love that was in His heart, or

the truth and power that were in His words. Nor do I indeed believe that Martha at this moment questioned either; and yet what a sad and unmistakable evidence of unbelief do these words of Martha afford! how soon has distrust come in like a flood and swept away almost every trace of that noble confession of her faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God: He that should come into the world." Why is this? how can we account for such a sudden change in her feelings? I believe we can find the clue in something of a very similar nature in our own hearts, which can believe and trust in the promise and power of God in great things, but are staggered and apprehensive, and distrustful as to comparatively lesser things, forgetting that the greater involves the lesser, and that the promise, which guarantees the greatest, is equally pledged to secure the least. It is the very unbelief, against which the apostle so touchingly remonstrates: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" It is the Lord's own especial precept and promise, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you;" and yet how many a timid, doubting one, who trusts God for eternal life, distrusts Him for daily bread; how many an inconsistent Martha stumbles on the dark mountains of unbelief, who can believe that the Saviour can recall the sleeping dead, and yet

doubts His power to stay corruption; who can acknowledge that He has power to forgive sin, and yet is limited to subdue or conquer the corruption of man's heart.

When Naaman the Syrian came with his horses and chariots, and stood before the door of the prophet, he had no doubt of his cure; his full expectation was that the prophet "would surely come out to him, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper." It was only when he received the simple message, "Go, wash in Jordan," that disappointment and distrust arose in his mind. So something of a similar feeling seems to have arisen in Martha's mind: when Jesus said, "Thy brother shall rise again," there was instant reception and acknowledgment of the glorious truth; but when He said, "Take ye away the stone," referring to human means, and human instruments, distrust and disappointment immediately succeeded; and she who had not doubted the power of Jesus to recall the slumbering body of her brother, was staggered at the employment of a human hand to take away the stone. One cannot indeed read what was passing in Martha's mind, but I think something of Naaman's cavilling and unbelieving spirit must have taken possession of her heart.

But, oh, what a saddening, what a crushing feeling do Martha's words give us of our common doom: "By this time he stinketh!" The brother

so beloved, by whose side they had so watched, into whose features they had so anxiously and so earnestly looked to notice every change, and on whose lifeless yet still warm lips they had no doubt impressed the last kiss of affection, was now become a loathsome object on which they could no longer bear to dwell. I have often thought what an equally sad and heart-rending idea does the language of Abraham, when preparing for the burial of his wife, give us of the common mortality of our nature. "Give me," he says to the sons of Heth, "give me the possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead *out of my sight*." What! Sarah, the wife of his youth, the wife of his bosom, who had been unto him as his own soul, and for whom he was come to weep and to mourn; he could no longer bear to look upon, he would fain bury her out of his sight. Yet how consoling is it to stand with Jesus by the side of our brother's grave, and to know that the same voice which awakened Lazarus out of his sleep, shall awaken every relative and dear one that is now sleeping with him in the dust of the earth; and though man's original sentence must be carried out, that "dust they are, and unto dust they shall return," yet even the very dust of those that sleep in Jesus is dear to, and watched by Him; and that dark and loathsome as the grave is to the natural sense, yet Jesus Himself has lain in it, and consecrated it, not indeed as the final

home, but as the depositary for a season, the resting-spot or halting-place of the dust of His chosen ones, till He shall change their vile bodies, and they become like unto His glorious body, and so be with the Lord for evermore.

SECTION LXVII.

(Chapter xi. verse 47 to the end.)

How remarkably did the conduct of the Pharisees on this occasion illustrate our Lord's declaration in one of His parables, that if men hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. The whole proceeding of the council on this occasion is one of the most awful instances on record of the hardening influence of malicious and sinful passions—fighting against God even with the most thorough conviction that it was against His work and power they were laying their evil counsels—yet as there were some of the Jews present at the resurrection of Lazarus, on whom that miracle had a saving and a gracious effect, leading them to believe on Him who wrought it, while others, though they could not disbelieve the evidence of their senses, were only exasperated and incited to accuse Him; so even here, in this council of the chief priests and Pharisees, I think we may detect


traces of divided opinions and divided counsels: some wishing to restrain their more infuriated and hardened colleagues, and others again urging them on to the last outrage, by conjuring up all imaginary peril and degradation to their place and nation. We may, without the slightest misconstruction or alteration of a word, imagine the first class of arguers to reason with their brethren in council on the folly and wickedness of thus plotting against the life and liberty of One, who had shewn by such undoubted miracles that He was indeed come from God. "What do we? for what are we met in council? why are we summoned in such haste? Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do touching this man, for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by Him is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. If this man were not of God, He could do nothing; and if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." It was, we know, at this council that the decision was come to, to put Jesus to death; and we are told by a preceding evangelist that one of the members of the Sanhedrim, Joseph of Arimathæa, had not consented to their counsel and deed, meaning, there can be little doubt, this counsel to put Jesus to death; and we know of another member of the Sanhedrim, Nicodemus, who had on a previous occasion remonstrated against the partiality and

prejudice of their judgment; and there might have been others, who took the part of justice and humanity. Others again, in reply to their suggestions to leave Jesus unmolested, argued that if they left Him thus alone, all men would believe on Him, and the Romans would come and take away even the remnant of sovereignty and power they still enjoyed.

It was at this juncture of divided parties and divided opinions that Caiaphas the High Priest interfered with the weight of his authority; and, rebuking both parties, the one for leaving Jesus alone, and the other probably for not carrying their proposal far enough to meet his own cruel and malicious purposes, proceeds under that miserable plea and doctrine of expediency, and under cover of patriotism, to justify even the last extremity of putting Jesus to death.

Alas! how often are noble gifts and noble privileges prostituted to purposes of sin! how often are they employed to disguise selfish ends, and uphold unjust ones! Caiaphas was not the only individual, nor the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem the only council, that has laid down the dangerous doctrine that the end justifies the means, and that we may even do wrong to promote right. David had long before spoken of men of "double heart," who used to say, "Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?" and thought "with their tongues to prevail." And in one sense it was so here:

Caiaphas did prevail, and "from that day forward they took counsel together for to put Jesus to death." Yet we may truly say in the words of the same Psalmist, that "in the same net which they hid privily, was their own foot taken; "and the infamous counsel of the High Priest was, unconsciously to himself, overruled of God, not only to be the channel of the most precious and glorious truth that ever dawned upon a guilty world, but actually sealed and hastened the very ruin it proposed to deprecate. Caiaphas' counsel was that Jesus, though innocent, should die to save the Jewish nation from an imaginary evil. God's counsel was that Jesus should die indeed, but not for the Jews only, but for all the nations of the earth: that from His cross should go forth that call, "Look unto Me, all the ends of the earth, and be ye saved;" and that too, not from an imaginary, a fancied ruin, not from a temporal bondage and destruction, but from one, which had overwhelmed the whole human race in one wide universal ruin. It is sad to think that Caiaphas knew nothing of all this, nor ever did. He had his own wicked and malicious purposes to wreak, and beyond them, he neither looked nor cared. The death of Jesus, which he planned and accomplished, was no salvation to him; the blood which he caused to be shed upon that cross, had no healing, no cleansing virtue for him; the God of this world had effectually blinded his mind. One can



imagine Caiaphas returning to his palace from this council, exulting in his success, and eager to put its decree into execution ; we can imagine one more subtle than Caiaphas, and more fierce than even Jewish zealot, fanning the flame he had kindled, and, as it were, hounding on men's minds to his hellish will. But neither Satan, nor High Priest, nor Sanhedrim, could forestal God's hour by a single moment. The kings of the earth might set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together ; but till the Lord Himself said to the traitor, "What thou doest, do quickly," not a single weapon forged against Him could prosper.

SECTION LXVIII.


(Chapter xii. verse 1—11.)

Matt. xxvi. 6—13. Mark xiv. 3—9.

WE have not done with the family at Bethany ; we here meet them again in their own home, a re-united family, and re-united, too, under such peculiar circumstances. It were perhaps vain and profitless to inquire what the feelings of the risen one must have been, at once more returning to this world of sorrow and suffering, to mingle again in the duties and occupations of life after the glimpse vouchsafed to Him of the eternal world. There is one single instance on record, not indeed of one

who had passed through the grave and gate of death into the unseen world, and had returned thence, and alluded to what had passed there, but still of one who had been caught up into the third heaven or paradise, the abode and resting place of those who had departed hence in the Lord, and heard there unspeakable words which it is not lawful for man to utter. Where therefore an apostle in holy awe has drawn a veil, and what the Spirit of the Most High has not thought fit to permit him to reveal, let not us, with irreverent step, nor unhallowed gaze, presume to approach unto.

We here find Lazarus once more in the bosom of his family, with his two affectionate and loving sisters, and united with them in doing honour to the friend they loved, the Saviour who had so visited them in mercy. In the other evangelists it is said that this entertainment was held in the house of Simon who had been a leper, but whom Jesus had healed. Here the house and the host are not mentioned; but from the circumstance of Martha's serving at the feast, it would seem that Simon must have been an intimate and probably a near relative, and that Lazarus and his sisters resided with him at Bethany. It is a question however of no importance to us to solve. I would much rather lead you to enter with me into the guest-chamber, where sat the blessed Jesus, where Lazarus, the friend He loved, was admitted



to sit down to meat with Him,—a foretaste of that glorious Supper of the Lamb, where not only the risen Lazarus, but Martha and Mary, and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth, will be admitted to that blessed fellowship and communion.

One loves to trace how accurately and minutely every lineament in the character of these loving sisters is preserved in these records of divine truth. When we first hear of Martha, it is at an entertainment in honor of Jesus, and there her anxious spirit was occupied in the household task of welcoming her honoured guest by “serving tables.” We here find her undoubted and augmented love still developing itself in the same way, and acting a menial’s office, while her Lord sat at meat. When we first met Mary, she was sitting in calmer meditation at the feet of Jesus, and with holy fervour of spirit drinking in the gracious words and truths which fell from His lips; and we here again find her, not indeed in the quiet repose of sitting at the feet of Jesus, but still developing and giving utterance to the fervent feelings of her grateful love at the feet of her Lord, anointing them with the most precious unguent she could procure, and wiping His feet with the hairs of her head. It was in itself a costly offering; but love and gratitude know no limits, are deterred by no difficulties, and turned aside from its labour of love by no reproaches

or sarcasms. The whole house was filled with the odour of this fragrant unguent, like the oil upon the head of Aaron, which descended even to the skirts of his clothing, so this precious nard not only anointed the head and body, and even the feet of Jesus, but its fragrance diffused itself through the whole house; and, I doubt not, also went up through Him she loved as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. But it was not so with all in that guest-chamber: even there intruded the rankling spirit of malevolence and envy; even in the very room where Jesus sat among them, one of the guests gave way to indecent revilings of the honour paid to the present Saviour, and that guest was a disciple! It has been often said—and this incident most fearfully illustrates the truth—that heaven itself would be no heaven to a sinner, could such an one find admission there. Heaven is a prepared place, and heaven's inmates are a prepared people: all there is love, and if there be a rivalry or strife, it is only who shall love best and adore most. One is shocked and pained at this exhibition of such a covetous and jealous spirit in a disciple, though that disciple be Judas. It seems to jar upon the holy feelings of "wonder, love, and praise," with which one has, in spirit, entered that room where He sat Who once had said, "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus had come forth; and not only had He added, "Loose him and let him go,"

but was even now reclining at the same table with him who had seen corruption, but whose flesh had come again as the flesh of a little child.

How painfully appropriate and necessary is that injunction of our catechism, as to what is required of those who come to the Lord's supper, "that they be in charity with all men." We see even in this entertainment, where our Lord was bodily present, how much of unkindness and ungenerous remark arose in the heart of one, if not of more, and I fear that we too often carry with us into our seasons of holy intercourse and communion with the Lord, something, it may be, of jealousy or envy, or some unkindly feeling that has found admittance, and is putting all out of tune. At any rate, we cannot too prayerfully watch over the issues of our hearts, that in every season, and more especially seasons of communion, all be peace, and love, and glory to God. The very miracle that Jesus had wrought, and which in some measure led to this gushing forth of Mary's love in the honour she paid to Jesus, seems to have made but little impression upon Judas: nor was he alone in his feelings. Many indeed of the Jews had flocked to Bethany, attracted by the fame of the miracle, many of whom, we are told, were savingly impressed, and withdrawing themselves from all participation in the councils of their rulers, believed on Jesus; while alas! the same mercy that was a savour of life unto life to some, was only a savour of death

unto death to many ; and they, who could not and dared not deny that such a notable miracle had been wrought by Jesus, with the strangest infatuation and most suicidal folly thought to evade its power by compassing the death both of Lazarus and Jesus, and find their readiest tool in him who had already listened to the suggestions of the evil one in grudging and calling that a wasteful expenditure, which had been given to Jesus. How truly may we say of Judas, and of these chief priests and Pharisees, that Satan assuredly at this juncture must have gone and taken unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they had entered in and were dwelling there, and rendering their last state far worse and far more hopeless than the first.

SECTION LXIX.

(Chapter xii. verse 12—19.)

Matt. xxi. 1—16. Mark xi. 1—11. Luke xix. 28—44.

ALL the evangelists record this triumphant entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, but St. John alone gives us an insight into the circumstances that led to such an exhibition of popular enthusiasm in His favour. The disciples were altogether passive in the matter : two, indeed, we find from the preceding evangelists, had been sent to fetch the

ass' colt on which Jesus entered the city ; but beyond that, they appear to have taken no steps in the procession which was arranged to conduct their master into Jerusalem. Nay, it is expressly declared that they were at the time utterly unconscious of the ulterior purpose for which all was ordained and overruled by God : that they either knew not or remembered not the prediction in which, four hundred years before, the prophet had so accurately detailed every incident that was then to the very letter occurring before their eyes ; and that it was not till after the resurrection and ascension of their Lord, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, that the veil was at length removed from their eyes, and the declaration of the Lord by the mouth of His holy prophet revealed unto them, and they saw how He, who by a word could still the raging of the sea, and the noise of the waves, and the madness of the people, could with equal ease direct the enthusiasm and the shouting of the multitude to the fulfilment of His own predicted word and will. Well might the obdurate Pharisees be perplexed at this demonstration of popular favour, and regard the resurrection of Lazarus as the fatal source of all this display. The evangelist here distinctly tells us that it was for this reason the people were stirred up to meet Him and cry " Hosanna ! Blessed is the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord ! " and there can be no doubt, humanly speaking,

that had the lowly Jesus at that moment assumed the name and ensigns and office of a monarch, the majority of the nation would have acknowledged Him as such ; but His kingdom was not of this world—the end for which He came was not to be saluted on a throne, “Hail ! King of the Jews !” The salutation was indeed to meet His ears, but it was to be on the cross : the crown that was to encircle His brow was to be of thorns, and the sceptre in his hand a reed. Yet never was a title more appropriately given—never did king so glorious enter Jerusalem. “Behold ! thy King cometh !” said the prophet four hundred years before ; and nearly four hundred years before that prophet, another had declared that “the government should be on His shoulder, and that of the increase of His government and peace there should be no end, upon the throne of David and upon His kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.”

But have we no interest in this King ? Was He to reign only over Judea and in Jerusalem ? May not we rejoice in, and take the prophet’s message to ourselves, “Fear not ! Behold, thy King cometh !” And what is the declaration of David respecting the kingdom of David’s son ? How is it that David in the spirit thus speaks of Christ’s throne : “Thy throne, O God, is for ever : the sceptre of thy kingdom is a

right sceptre." I would, then, seriously press this home on all our hearts: that Christ is our king. Are we rendering to Him the fealty and service of loyal and obedient subjects? Are we giving to Him the unreserved and unqualified homage of our hearts? There was plenty of lip-service in these streets of Jerusalem on this memorable day, nor do I deny that it was in all probability much of it sincere; that their feelings were touched by the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead; their hopes and expectations strained to the utmost stretch by such unparalleled display of Almighty power; and that when they saw Jesus, though in this comparatively lowly guise, they could not restrain the overpowering convictions of the moment, and broke forth into those prophetic strains of their own sweet singer of Israel; and yet, remember, it was but for the moment. I do not say that every voice that was thus on this day loud in their acclamations of honour to the Saviour, were equally loud in their cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" But this is quite clear, that when those murderous cries were uttered, not one voice was lifted up in generous devotion or heroic loyalty to their King; and that in this sense, not apostles only, but all forsook Him and fled. And so, alas! it is with many a warm and earnest and impetuous feeling of our hearts; like a chord touched by the hands, it sends forth a responsive sound, but soon dies away: and feeling, however genuine,

however fervent at the moment, unless it has a far deeper root than on the mere surface of the heart, will too often suffer the next trifle to usurp its place, or it may be diverted, and altogether turned aside from its natural current, as in the present instance, by the workings of Satan, and the artful suggestions of designing men. Loyalty to our heavenly King is an ever-abiding principle, and though it may, and must gush out at the lips, its source is ever in the heart, and will regulate the whole life.

I have spoken of the minute fulfilment of ancient prophecy in this triumphant procession of Jesus into Jerusalem: how to the very letter it was accomplished; and I would just observe in addition, how still more remarkably, if possible, was another injunction of scripture carried out to its literal completion in the person of the Lamb of God. We read in the 12th chapter of Exodus, that the Israelites, at the period of their departure from Egypt, were ordered to take to them a lamb on the tenth day of the month, and keep it till the fourteenth, thus leaving an interval of four days; and so here our blessed Saviour, the true Paschal Lamb, entered Jerusalem on the very same day,* four days before He was crucified and slain. With what grateful and emphatic adoration may we repeat our Lord's own declaration, "Verily I say

* The 10th of the month of Abib.

unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.”


SECTION LXX.

(Chapter xii. verse 20—26.)

It is of little moment to inquire who these Greeks were that thus desired to see Jesus. We may reasonably conclude, indeed, that they were Gentiles, though in all probability converts to the Jewish faith; and hearing all these rumours, and this excitement respecting Jesus, were naturally desirous to see Him of whom such wondrous things were told. It is not, indeed, mentioned whether Jesus acceded to their request: yet I do not doubt it; nor that He who, though with a spiritual meaning, had said “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out,” would not fail to make His word literally true as regarded these humble inquirers. I call them humble, for there was no rude intrusion on the Saviour’s presence, and they had recourse to the most appropriate means of introduction, and appear to have waited in all patient quietness, till the will of Jesus was known. There can be little doubt, I think, that this reply of Jesus, and His address to His Father in heaven, and the answer to it from out of

heaven, all took place in the hearing of these Greeks ; and at any rate had an especial reference to them and to their inquiry.

But without touching further on this matter as regards them, I would ask you, is there not something very touching in the Saviour's here looking forward to that period when He was indeed to bring many sons to glory, but only through the process of His own sufferings and death? He does not, indeed, in direct terms make this application of His words, but how plain the inference He would have us to draw from them, and how sweetly simple and true to nature the imagery which He here uses. I have before alluded to the human love of the objects of creation, which seem to have been so strong in Jesus: how He has recourse to the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and all the inanimate symbols of His creative love, the grain and the flower of the field, and the vine, and the fig-tree, and even the thorn and the thistle, and the ploughman at the handle of his plough, and the woman at her grinding-mill, to illustrate the truths He is delivering ; and so here He can find no apter image of His own death, and the gracious purposes that were to result from it, than the committal of a corn of wheat to the ground, and its dying there. The infidel will tell you that it dies not, and that the image is incorrect and untrue, and that he who used it could know but little of that seed's process



beneath the sod that covered it. We may reply in the words of the apostle adopting the same imagery, "Thou fool! that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." And, blessed be God, it does die; and because it dies, it is so apt, so consoling, so glorious an illustration of the truths which our Lord and His apostle would mutually draw from it.

During the personal ministry of Jesus, when in its earlier portion He had sent forth the twelve with their commission to preach the gospel, His restriction on their work was, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles;" and, with one or two exceptions of mercy, He seems to have confined His own ministry entirely to the Jewish nation. But "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" was to be the new commission under which they were to act after His resurrection; and we are told how His soul was straitened till He had accomplished His own purpose of bringing many souls to glory; and He well knew that the moment His spirit had departed from the body, that moment the partition-wall, that had so long separated Jew from Gentile, would be rent in twain, and the Gentiles flock in "like doves to the windows." What a glorious harvest had even the death of Lazarus been! "Many of the Jews believed on Him," "Behold, the world is gone after Him," "All men will believe on Him," and, now, certain Greeks, the

first fruits, not of Achaia only, but of the whole Gentile world, desired to see Jesus. And if the death of Lazarus, and his resurrection from his mortal grave, could thus be the precursor of such a glorious resurrection of many "from a death of sin unto a life of righteousness," *much more* they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ." It is a most glorious truth, which our Lord here shadows forth to us, and which He proceeds to enforce in so earnest and emphatic a manner, that the hour of His death was to be the hour of His glory; and will it not be the same to all them that are His? We are naturally disposed to look on death as a period of dismay and dread, of shrinking and abhorrence; and there is no doubt much about it that gives it that painful character. There is that in its approach, in its progress, and above all, in its consummation, which seems to give it the character of a stern and cruel conqueror, a relentless tyrant, whose power is tracked by desolation and decay. Humanly speaking, there is, no doubt, humiliation in death, and most justly so, for it is the penalty of sin: yet how has Jesus changed its aspect! how has the king of terrors retreated before the King of Glory! Because He liveth, therefore shall we live also. How powerfully, then, does Jesus bid those that are His to be indifferent to the life that now is; which, whatever may be its glory, whatever may be the care

bestowed upon it, is perishing beneath our hands, and must eventually be laid aside and lost; while the life, to which death is the gate, is eternal in the heavens. But remember the condition: if any is seeking to know Me, and desirous to serve Me, let him follow Me. Be a follower of Jesus—follow Him in all meekness and lowliness of spirit, and have the same mind which was in Him; follow Him whithersoever He calleth, and whithersoever He leadeth; and though every step on earth may be a step of pain and suffering, of shame and reproach, yet him that serveth, and him that followeth shall my Father honour; and where I am, in mine own home of glory, there shall my servant be, no longer a servant, but a son, a brother, and a friend.

SECTION LXXI.

(Chapter xii. verse 27—33).

It behoved Christ to be made like unto His brethren, and we see this eminently exemplified here. How closely is His sorrow blended with rejoicing; His humiliation with His triumph; His shame with His glory! He had but a moment before declared that the hour was now come in which the Son of Man should be glorified, and yet we here find Him uttering that plaintive

expostulation with His own soul, "Now is my soul troubled;" so troubled, that I know not what to say, nor in what channel to direct my prayers. I know that I shall bring many sons to glory; I know that as the grain of wheat dieth in the ground to produce an abundant harvest, so My death will be the glorious gathering in of the Gentiles; and I, if I be lifted up on my cross of shame, shall draw all men unto Me: and yet, as mine hour of suffering draweth nigh, My human nature shrinketh from the trial. What shall I say? Shall I pray to the Father, and say, "Father, save Me from this hour: let this cup pass from me." Nay, that would be to frustrate my whole mission, to violate the pledge I gave, the covenant I entered into, the engagement I voluntarily undertook: that would be to falsify every word that holy men of God spake as they were moved by My Holy Spirit; to leave man miserable, helpless, hopeless; to rob God of His glory, and leave Satan conqueror in the fight. It was for this end I came into the world to suffer and to die. Every type foreshadowed this hour; every prophecy proclaimed it. It must needs be that I should suffer these things, and enter into My glory. Rather, then, let my prayer be, "Father, glorify Thine own name," by exhibiting in My person that Thou art a just God, and hatest iniquity, and that Thou has laid on Me, as their surety, the transgressions of My people; and yet, though thus

just in exacting to the uttermost farthing the ransom Thou hast provided, Thou canst be also, and art indeed a God of mercy in justifying even the chief of sinners who shall believe on Me. Father, accept the sacrifice Thou hast provided, the Lamb ready to be offered, and let the sinner go free. We may well imagine this to be the extended meaning of our Lord's prayer, "Father, glorify Thy name!" that though it involved this momentary human shrinking from suffering, it combined all that yearning over lost sinners which first drew Him from His Father's bosom. And He was heard in that He spake: it was His Father's glory that He sought—"I seek not mine own glory" He had said not long before. "Father, glorify *Thy* name; though it be through mine own suffering, mine own ignominy and reproach, yet I shrink not." It was His Father's will, and that will was His own; and like Isaac, that type of His obedience even unto death,—He, too, was willing to go to the land of Moriah, an unresisting victim, bearing the wood for the burnt offering. And now that same voice, which out of heaven called to the patriarch to stay *his* sacrifice, called to Jesus, His own, His beloved Son, to assure Him, not that He would spare one drop of that cup of bitterness He had undertaken to drink, but that in accepting it He would for ever glorify His name, magnifying the law, and making it honourable; and that He would thus shew to a world in ruins

that He had accepted the surety, and that He had discharged the debt by raising Jesus from the dead, and giving Him a name that should be above every name. But did this voice from heaven come for Jesus' sake? Did He need His Father's audible assurance of love to support Him in the conflict He was to undergo, and the anguish He was to endure? Did Jesus for a moment doubt that Father's love, or the issues of the conflict, that it would indeed redound to the Father's glory and His own, in the redemption and deliverance of a guilty world? As He had said at the grave of Lazarus, He knew that His Father heard Him always; yet for the sake of those that stood by that grave He uttered that thankful acknowledgment of His Father's ever-open ear,—so now "the Highest gave His voice," not for His son's sake, but for their sakes who heard it; and though to all human appearance Jesus would be delivered into the hands of wicked and cruel men, and though human tribunals would drag Jesus before them, and condemn Him as the guilty one, and nail Him to the cross, yet in reality it was the ruined world that was on its trial; its prince and its ruler arraigned before a more unerring bar than man's, and its righteous sentence would be that the whole world was guilty before God; and though there would be mercy and pardon, and passing over their transgressions for the Lord's chosen remnant, who should be found sprinkled

with the blood of the Lamb, yet for the Prince of this world, he would be utterly cast out, and his end be that he be "tormented day and night for ever and ever."

It is an awful reflection that God has ever made a separation between the children of light, and of darkness; between the children of God, and of the wicked one, and that this separation will be a final one. It is true we are, by nature, of this guilty and condemned world; the sentence is against us, as against all, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" but "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" and if we would not be "condemned with the world," we must come out from it and be separate, lest we fall into her plagues. I dare not say of ourselves that we have all come out; I know the world is bidding high for your allegiance, and, it may be, though like that youthful prince in the book of Kings, "who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest," you too while under the influence of holy teaching, and, as it were, in the atmosphere of a holy home, may think you have given up your hearts to follow the Lord fully, yet, as when Jehoiada died, evil counsellors came in his place, so when you go forth from pious homes, and parental prayers, and holy patterns, other associates may take their place, and draw you aside from Him, who had your early love. You will not, it is true, hear a voice from heaven calling on you to follow

Jesus ; and even if you did, it might not convince, it might bewilder, and mislead, as it did some here, who thought it only thunder ; but you may say with Peter, “ We have a more sure word, whereunto we should do well to take heed ;” even that plain, and simple, and unerring word of God, which says, “ Love not the world, nor the things of the world,” and that “ if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

SECTION LXXII.

(Chapter xii. verse 34—36).

WHAT a very solemn warning is here held out in these words of our Lord, not to the Jews only to whom they were addressed, but to every individual : “ Yet a little while is the light with you.” Mercy mingles with judgment, the warning is tempered with an intimation that there is a period, though a brief one, in which man may escape: yet a little while longer is the light vouchsafed ; there is a space, or rather a space yet given in which to repent—as our Lord said to this very evangelist in the revelation made to him, “ I gave her space to repent”—though she availed not herself of it, and “ she repented not.” Avail yourselves therefore of the light, ere it be withdrawn. The Jews could not understand a suffering Saviour; their prejudices re-

volted at the idea, their natural pride was wounded, their every expectation and hope thwarted. They had read their Scriptures with the veil upon their hearts, and had looked to those passages alone which had detailed the triumphs of a conquering Messiah, "of whose government there should be no end," and whose throne should be established as the sun, and the moon, and the rainbow in the heavens. When therefore they heard Jesus speak of death, and as they well understood of an ignominious death, they scoffingly demanded of Him, what sort of a Son of Man He represented Himself to be, so utterly at variance with their reading of their Scriptures. Had not God declared by the mouth of His servant David, "His seed will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven;" is it not written that "His dominion shall be an everlasting dominion?" Whom makest thou then thyself? It was in reply to this contemptuous and derisive demand, that our Saviour uttered this solemn but still merciful warning: "Yet a little while is the light with you." A few more days, and that light, which was sent into the world to lighten every man that would come unto it, would be quenched, and that too by their own infatuated and suicidal hands. How earnestly, how pathetically would that voice of Jesus still call them to repentance! how was His spirit even then yearning to gather them as a hen gathereth her chickens;

and they would not. Our Lord has laid His finger, as it were, on the plague-spot of our hearts, when in addition to the precept, "Walk in the light," He has enjoined the still more solemn and important one, "Believe in the light." There is such a thing, be assured, as walking in the very blaze of the noon-day, and yet not believing in the light that shines around us. We see it every day; I fear we could detect it in our own hearts; we see persons actually sitting in the sunshine, apparently warming themselves in the enjoyment of its beams, and yet disbelieving its existence, and shivering amid its warmth. How is this inconsistency? Of course Jesus is not here speaking of the sun in the heavens, of the natural light, which every morning cometh forth out of its chamber and rejoiceth to run its course: men look anxiously enough for that to ripen the fruits of the earth, or to promote their own pleasure and comfort, and are wide awake to these signs of the day and weather. But Jesus is here speaking of Himself as the Light, of His word as the lamp of our feet, of His Gospel and His Truth as the guide and solace of our way. And assuredly in this land this light is not hidden under a bushel, nor under a bed; it is placed on high, so that all may see its light and rejoice beneath its beams. And men do walk in this light, in the very midst of it, it is around and about them, beside their path, and about their bed. It is beam upon beam, ray upon ray; line upon line,

and precept upon precept; and yet in the midst of it all, the majority do not believe in it, nor walk as if they gave the least credence to it.

Just let me illustrate this in one plain and simple point. Would a thief, think you, plunder in the very sight of the owner to whom the property belonged, if he felt and knew that his eye was watching every movement? No! as long as the owner's eye was upon him, his hands would be stayed. Well, then, God's eye,—the light of that all-seeing eye is ever on the sinner, in the night as in the day; why then does not the sinner stay his guilty deeds? simply because, though he walks in the light, he does not believe in the light; he has said to himself, like one of old, "Tush! the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it."

It is therefore in no unrighteousness that this light is withdrawn from those who abuse it. It is granted but for a space, "yet a little while;" and whether it be nations, or churches, or individuals, it is still the same; the abuse of God's privileges invariably leads to the withdrawal of them. It was so with those to whom our Lord addressed these words; the glorious light that through so many ages had shone over Palestine was soon quenched in darkness, and has remained so for more than 1800 years. The candlestick that was in the midst of the seven Asian Churches was alike withdrawn, and the record of its intended

withdrawal is almost the only record of its having ever existed. And is it not so with individuals every day? I do not speak of the withdrawal at death; we all feel and know that darkness is associated with death, and that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave;" but I think there is a more fearful withdrawal intimated in these verses, where it is said that "Jesus departed, and did hide Himself from them." There is a period when God's spirit ceases to strive and to plead with man, when he will be left to his own counsels, and to follow his own devices. The light will still shine around, but he heeds it not; its warmth will invigorate and cheer others, but he will not feel it; and yet with the infatuation of the blinded one of old, he will be saying to himself, "Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire;" and yet with the predicted curse of Israel, he will "grope at noon-day, as the blind gropeth in darkness."

SECTION LXXIII.

(Chapter xii. verse 37 to the end.)

It is a homely saying, that "none are so blind as those that won't see;" but homely as it is, it is full of awful truth. The man born blind we should think a pitiable object, on whose darkened

orbs no outward object had ever been reflected ; or the man whom an accident has deprived of that power of sight, which he had before enjoyed, and who was henceforth to grope his way in obscurity, and out of darkness ; or a man confined in a dark and dismal dungeon, where the scantiest ray of light penetrates, and his eye gradually loses its accustomed power, and he cannot recognize between the coming and departing day. All these are no doubt melancholy cases of privation, of a sense the most valuable of all we enjoy. But how compensating the mercy and loving-kindness of God even in such cases ;—take for instance the man born blind, of whom we read some short time ago, how immeasurably superior were his privileges even in his darkened state to those bigotted and self-righteous Pharisees, who declared they saw, and therefore their sin remained ; and who in the midst of their boasted light saw not the fatal precipice to which they were hastening. Or again, the man in his dungeon ; his limbs may be fettered, but his mind is free ; his body may with difficulty move even in the smallest space, but his mind can roam unshackled through all space, can hold converse with the noblest truths, and see more clearly than ever he did in his days of freedom, and even in midnight darkness hymns of holy joy and thanksgiving may echo through his dungeon. How far more sad the case of these men, to whom our Lord was now speaking : they

saw, but they would not perceive nor understand ; they saw the miracles, which Jesus performed before their eyes, acknowledged, or at least could not deny their reality, nay, even found fault with Jesus for performing them, and blamed those that came for healing, but with all this would not believe, as the poor blind man did, that "if He were not of God, He could do nothing;" or as one of their own body had acknowledged, that "no man could do the miracles that Jesus did, except God were with him."

It is a strange but striking contrast ; some in the midst of light yet in darkness, and some in the midst of darkness yet walking in the light. Humanly speaking, there may be no apparent difference ; or, if there be, the darkened ones may say, "We see," and may turn away in contempt from those, who, in their estimation, enjoy no light.* And yet we may say of these, as Jesus said of His means of sustenance, "I have meat to eat that ye

* "He that has light within his own clear breast,
 May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day ;
 But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts,
 Benighted walks under the mid-day sun,
 Himself is his own dungeon."

MILTON, *Comus*.

"It is probable," says Bishop Jebb, "that the whole range of literature, ancient and modern, sacred and profane, does not afford a better illustration of this passage than the strains of our great poet."

know not of," so these have a light, and "a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not." I do not deny that there may be much of darkness around the path even of a child of God; there is much that he knoweth not now, much that he cannot and will not comprehend fully, till he sees it in the light of eternity. Many tears may dim his sight, even as he walks by faith: as the billows of God's trials go over him, there is darkness, even as and while he passes through them; but still in the midst of all, God's promise is true, that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;" and because he is walking in the light of God's truth, and God's Word is a lanthorn to his path, he shall not stumble. And even at the last, in that hour of deep emergency and need, when the departing pilgrim is passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death, even then "the darkness is no darkness;" for Jesus is the staff and the stay as well as the light of his feeble steps; while it is a fearful termination of the sinner's way, that "to them is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Even while Jesus was speaking these words, there was still mercy for many, for all if they would accept it: He had indeed said before, in a preceding chapter, "For judgment I am come into this world that they which see not might see, and that they which see (or think they see) might be made blind." The reception or rejection of His words would be as a

winnowing fan to separate between the chaff and the wheat; but here in this His last public address, this His last appeal, His final call and pleading with them, it is mercy alone He proclaims, "I came, not to judge the world, but to save the world." That was His mission, the errand on which the Father sent the Son, and the purpose for which that Son left His Father's bosom. But though salvation was the glorious theme of Gospel truth, Jesus here adds a very solemn word of caution, to which we shall do well to take earnest heed; for to us is the same offer made, it is still with us the accepted time, it is still to us the day of salvation; the offer still sounds in our ears, mercy is still waiting to be gracious; nay, there is mercy in that declaration which puts before us the alternative of rejection, which carries us onwards through and beyond this period of pleading, and mercy, and forbearance to that last day, when every word this Saviour hath spoken to us, every message He has sent us, every precept He hath enjoined, and every warning He has given shall be the rule by which we shall be judged in that day. We may fritter down and pare away God's Word here, but we shall not be able to evade or gainsay it there.

SECTION LXXIV.


(Chapter xiii. verse 1—5.)

I BELIEVE it to be no unusual feeling which arises in our minds as we read this portion of scripture, that this act of our Lord's is a most astonishing as well as touching instance of condescension on the part of Jesus. Even in an oriental country, and with oriental customs, I do not find from scripture narratives that it was the practice to provide more than the water for the customary washing of a guest's feet; or that any master of a family or owner of a tent himself and with his own hands was expected to perform the office for a guest, or considered deficient in hospitality if he omitted to do it. We read of Abraham saying to the three men in the plains of Mamre, "Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet." And in the same spirit Lot says, "Turn in, my lords, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet." And again, Laban gave to Eleazar "water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him;" but it would appear to have been no part of hospitality or expected courtesy that the master performed this office himself.

I do not think that we thoroughly comprehend the spiritual signification of our Lord's act—cer-

tainly not at first sight—and we are apt to confine His purpose to an exhibition and pattern of humility alone. It is in this light that it has been so often viewed, and I would add, so sadly perverted by many to evidence, not the humility and abasement of the God of heaven in the form and office of a servant, but the haughty spirit of an earthly prince, or potentate, or pope, calling on those who stand looking and wondering, to admire the gracious condescension with which he performs a menial's office to a beggar; and more than this, calling on God also to put it down to his account of good deeds and meritorious services. Our Lord, one would think, has so carefully guarded against this abuse, and so explicitly detailed His meaning in the act, that did we not know, and did not history continually record instances, how human pride finds its sweetest nourishment in its voluntary and self-exacted humiliations and penances, we should hardly understand this miserable abuse of the condescension of Jesus, which so brings home to our conceptions, and so endears to our hearts this most gracious proof of our Lord's own assertion, that "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

The incident itself is introduced to us with a remark which bespeaks our truest and most grateful sympathies. It was no common hour in which Jesus exhibited this token of His undying love:



it is expressly stated that the hour had now arrived when "He should depart out of this world,"—it is true it is added, "to go unto His Father," and resume with Him the glories He had before the world was: but the present, the immediate hour was an hour of bitterness and suffering, and one might well believe that His soul would be so weighed down with the accumulated anguish of that hour, and the perfect consciousness of all that should befall Him; that even of those among whom He was then sitting at the social feast, His chosen friends and followers, and over whom His soul was then yearning in tenderest affection, one had already treachery and betrayal in his heart; another, ere the night had closed, would deny all knowledge of Him, and all would forsake Him and leave Him alone. Humanly speaking, one would have imagined that His thoughts would have dwelt chiefly and altogether on the sufferings and sorrows that so soon awaited Him, and the desertion of those around Him: or if His thoughts could have been diverted for a season from those scenes of earthly suffering, they would have turned to that Father to whom He was going, and that glory He was so soon to resume,—but, no—as one of His followers afterwards said of himself, "None of these things moved Him;" and as for the suffering through which He was to pass, it was His Father's will to put that cup into His hands, and He had before declared of Himself, by the mouth

of His Holy Prophet, His readiness to accept it at His Father's hands. "In the volume of the book it is written of Me, that I should fulfil Thy will;" and, "My God, I am content to do it"—nay, as the word is, "I *delight* to do it." How touching, then, the declaration here made—"that when Jesus knew that His hour was come, that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." It is seldom or never so with human love. I do not say that there is no love that loves not to the close: even human love, with all its infirmities, will triumph amid and above the agonies of death; but they *may* forget, and they *have* forgotten; and it is often the case that the dimmed eye cannot trace the features, nor the deafened ear recognize the voices of those most dear; and it may be, too, the clouded intellect have no knowledge of the hand of earthly affection that ministers to its needs,—but where Jesus loves, He loveth unto the close. And when will that close be? When His own Godhead shall cease, when heaven itself shall be dark and void, and there shall be no harps, no hearts, no voices to hymn His praise—then may be the close, but not till then. But what a precious word is it that the spirit here uses by the pen of the evangelist, "His own which are in the world"—yes, even in this world of sin and desolation, where Satan rules and ruins—even here

Jesus has His own. He does not take them out of the world—that was not His prayer nor His purpose for them—but He keeps them in it, and He keeps them from it; they are fenced round by His holy attributes and His everlasting love, and “no one can pluck them out of His, no one is able to pluck them out of His Father’s hands.” It is a solemn inquiry, “Are we of these, His own, that are in the world?” I do not bid you look here nor there, among the great, the noble, and the mighty; there are of the Lord’s own even among them, but whosoever they are, or wheresoever they are as to outward circumstances, be they with the beggar at the rich man’s gate, or with the rich man himself at his own board, all those that are His are both “poor in spirit” and “pure in heart.”

SECTION LXXV.

(Chapter xiii. verse 6—11.)

I do not wonder at the impetuous and affectionate Peter thrusting aside almost with holy dread his Master’s condescending offer to wash his feet. One feels fully convinced in one’s own mind, that if we had been present at that most singular manifestation of Christ’s love and humiliation, and the Saviour had come to us for the same purpose, that the very words which would have

burst from our astonished lips would have been identically those of Peter, "Lord, dost *Thou* wash my feet?" and it might have been that we had gone on to say with him, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." And yet we now know how misjudging, how unreflecting was the conduct of the disciple—how compassionate, and forbearing, and forgiving the remonstrance of His master, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." A similar feeling is, I fear, too often manifested in many a child of God, repudiating, it may be in real humility, what the Lord has in mercy and love vouchsafed to afford. It was no doubt a wondrous act of condescension in the blessed Jesus to arise from the table at which He was seated, and at which He was about to partake, for the last time, of the Paschal supper with His disciples; to lay aside His own garment, and assume the habiliment and undertake the lowest office of a menial. But it was a still more astonishing humiliation when He at first laid aside the glory which He had with the Father in the beginning, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man. It was far more astounding that He should offer His own blood to cleanse sinners from their sins, than that He should typify that act by the significant emblem of an outward washing. But Peter at that time knew not all this; he understood it only as a literal and simple act of condescension on his Master's part, arising only and intended

probably, as a practical rebuke of that unseemly dispute, which had just before taken place among them, as to which should be the greatest and exercise dominion over the rest; and though one dares not say that there was no sin in his ignorance, and that Jesus might have truly replied to him as He did to another disciple, "Hast thou been so long time with Me, Peter, and not known" my mission nor its purpose? still there was something pardonable, we may hope, even in the mistaken humility that would have repudiated this evidence of his Saviour's love. And how true to nature, how strikingly in keeping with the apostle's fervent character, was that outburst, that gushing forth of his affectionate and eager temper, which, when told, that if Jesus washed him not, he had no part with the Saviour he so loved, would have stretched forth not his feet only, but his hands, and his head, and his whole body,—and here, as I conceive, is the chief significancy of our Lord's emblem. I do not deny the other lessons that were inculcated in it: I believe, in due subordination they were all intended to be impressed on the minds of every disciple, but still this was the main, the chief instruction to be gathered; and under the peculiar circumstances in which they were, how affecting and consolatory. They were not all clean; and He, to whom all hearts are open, singled out the one which was the polluted and unclean one; and yet with what touching

tenderness, though He knew their weaknesses, though He was thoroughly aware of their speedy desertion of Him, yet even in this hour He would separate between the premeditated guilt and baseness of the one, and the natural infirmity and timidity of the rest.

He that has bathed needs not to re-bathe for the purposes of cleanliness, though his feet may become soiled in passing from the bath to the dressing room; and so, once bathed in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, the sinner is clean every whit, yet still needs daily renewing, daily cleansing from those pollutions acquired by contact with the world, and inseparable from the infirmity of our nature;—and oh! what a precious truth is here shadowed forth for the support and encouragement of God's children, "that whatsoever defilements they may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world through the lusts of the flesh, or the wiles of Satan, being purged and done away, they may be presented pure and without spot before Him." They cannot walk from day to day, nor hour to hour, without some soil or stain from within or from without, and unless washed and made clean every day and every moment by the blood of Jesus, they would have no part with Him.

It was this same evangelist, John, to whom was manifested that glorious vision of God's seat in heaven, encircled by "the rainbow round about


the throne," symbol of eternal truth, and love, and promise; but oh! what a still more glorious thought, that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness—even the blood of Jesus—ever open, ever flowing, as it were, round about the throne of God, and that every thought as it rises in their hearts, every word as it passes their lips, and every action of the lives of God's children pass through and are bathed in that cleansing stream, and as they come forth from the healing waters, are presented before God "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" and as Naaman left his defiling leprosy in the waters of Jordan, so do the Lord's redeemed ones leave every stain, every soil and blemish in that fountain which the Saviour's love has provided, and which He here typified when He washed His disciples' feet.

SECTION LXXVI.

(Chapter xiii. verse 12—17.)

THERE is something very touching in the circumstance of our Lord's going from disciple to disciple engaged in the lowly and menial office of washing the feet of each. Had a spectator been admitted to the scene, he would have looked upon them as all alike honoured of their master, as all

alike partook of the same honourable distinction ; and yet it was not so : to the outward gaze of man, indeed, all were alike participating in the same precious privileges—all had sat down at the Paschal table, and were about to partake of the Paschal feast : all, too, had partaken of that outward ablution which was to represent and signify the inward cleansing and renewing of the mind ;—but the outward act was not alone sufficient, and there was one who still remained uncleansed. “Ye are not all clean,” said our Lord ; yet Judas shared alike with his brethren in the condescension of his Master—Jesus washed the feet of Judas as He washed those of Peter, but the outward washing reached not the inward impurity : Satan had already entered the heart of that unhappy one, and suggested his fearful crime, and Judas, alas ! had given lodgment, if not welcome, to the thought. He had no doubt heard his Master say on a former occasion with holy abhorrence, even to the affectionate Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan !” and had the same dread, the some horror arisen in his own heart when the thought of betraying his Master was first put into his heart, and had the same language proceeded from his lips, Satan would have missed his prey ; but he gave admission to the tempter, and had even at this time acted on the suggestion, and had made appointment to meet the enemies of Christ to betray Him unto them. It were useless to ask



what must have been the feelings of the yet undetected, and as far as he knew, yet unsuspected traitor, when his loving gracious Lord approached him on His errand of condescending tenderness to wash and to wipe his feet. Not a word passed his lips: whether he was touched with a momentary remorse, or whether he rejoiced in what he deemed an evidence of his Lord's still unsuspecting confidence, we know not. If there were remorse, it could have been but for a moment; and at any rate, it is a sad and fearful proof that no outward privileges are of themselves of any avail—that a man may have the name, and even the office of a disciple, that he may be outwardly washed with the waters of baptism and of cleansing, that he may sit at meat with his Lord at His sacramental table, and yet remain every whit unclean with covetousness, anger, malice, and revenge in his heart, and Satan taking possession of the garnished tenement to dwell there.

I have already alluded to the purposes which our Lord had in view in this interesting incident, and the immediate circumstances under which it took place. It must indeed have been a most touching rebuke to their unseemly disputations for earthly precedence, to see that Master humbling Himself to the lowest office of a menial as regarded their persons. One cannot doubt, therefore—for He Himself affirms it—that one purpose of His act was to inculcate that spirit of meekness

and humility so especially in accordance with a disciple of a crucified Redeemer. What has man at all to do with pride? What has a follower of the lowly Jesus to do with it? He, indeed, our Lord and master, has set us an example that we should follow His steps, not seeking our own pre-eminence, but in honour preferring one another, taking the lowest place if assigned to us, and willing, nay, glad and grateful to serve in it if it be our Master's will, and our Master's work in which we are engaged. I would just say a word, before we part with the subject, on the expression of our Lord, where He says, "As I have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet," because its literal meaning seems to contradict what I said a night or two ago." Jesus no doubt spoke in the language of the country, and in conformity to the usages of that country; and we well know that in an oriental clime to offer water to wash the feet of every visitor, and every guest, was an acknowledged part of hospitality, as the withholding of it would be remarked as the act of a grudging and a churlish host. Jesus Himself made it a complaint against one who had invited Him to his house; "Thou gavest Me no water to wash My feet." But what was courteous and common in Eastern countries would be far otherwise in our more northern climes, and to attempt to comply with the literal injunction of our Lord, would lead only to inconvenience and


rudeness ; or, under the semblance of great humility, might administer nutriment to the most offensive spiritual pride. I do not deny that there are Christians, and most humble-minded, self-denying, devoted followers of the Lord Jesus—I mean the Moravian Christians—who do take the command literally, and wash one another's feet as an act of Christian duty and obedience ; but though I would not adopt their reading, I would most earnestly desire to imitate the spirit of their devotedness, and the sincerity of their humility. It is in strange contrast to these, the simplest-minded of Christ's followers, that in the Romish church the "washing of feet" forms almost as essential a part of their religious ceremony as the "washing of pots and pans" in the Jewish church ; and though one would hesitate to scrutinize another's heart, one can hardly be mistaken in the supposition that the Pope of Rome, in that gorgeous display of humility, is at least in the very worst position possible for the growth of a lowly spirit : and, after all, "to wash one another's feet" would be no great sacrifice, would involve no very serious amount of self-denial or surrender. I think, however, that our Lord meant by this incident to inculcate on us all an habitual disposition to be ready and willing for every office of love and kindness to a fellow-creature ; to deem it no degradation to be found as a teacher and instructor even of the lowest and the outcast ; to be found

kneeling at the side of a suffering fellow-creature, however poor or repulsive his circumstances may be, and with our own hands administer to their comfort ; to sit with unwearied assiduity and unruffled temper by the side of peevish querulousness or irritable impatience, and supply with all the watchfulness of anxious love even the morbid cravings of disease, or assuage the fevered restlessness of delirium ; and thus in every shape and form, in every variety of the Christian spirit to shew that we are indeed followers of Him, who Himself stooped from His own holy and pure abode in heaven to this loathsome lazar-house of earth, and there endured the contradiction and hostility of sinners.

SECTION LXXVII.

(Chapter xiii. verse 18—30.)

HUMANLY speaking, one would say that there could hardly be a greater death-blow to any cause than a traitor in its ranks, and such a traitor as Judas was here proving himself to be in compassing the death of the very leader of the cause. To the other associates of that cause it would be a grievous blow : the defection of one leading them to look with suspicion on each other, as if the same taint of treachery and apostacy had spread



further and corrupted more; and to the world at large it would imply that one at least had seen cause to doubt the truthfulness, or question the success of the cause. At any rate, and under ordinary circumstances, the apostacy of one who had so long been their associate, and a brother beloved and confided in, must have been a grievous discouragement to the rest;—and such were the very feelings that distressed the minds of the apostles on receiving the painful communication that one of their number was a traitor: doubt, distress of mind, suspicion one of another—nay, even of themselves and their own fidelity,—and anxiety to discover who could be the base apostate. Nay, we are told that even Jesus himself shared in the painful feelings, and was “troubled in spirit,” as He communicated the sad intelligence to the rest; and He must indeed have had deep sorrow in His heart as he thought of the treachery and the ingratitude which thus lurked at His side. He had indeed known from the beginning who it was that should betray Him: when He enlisted Judas into the ranks of His followers, He knew that He was enrolling an enemy and a traitor—nay, long before that, when His earthly progenitor, David, was driven from his throne by the son whom He had forgiven, restored, and so fondly loved, He had, by His Holy Spirit, put into the mouth of David the very language which he employed to designate Ahitophel’s treachery to

himself, and to typify the still more fearful treachery that should betray the Son of David. "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." Alas! alas! how many similar sorrows, how many wounds of a like nature must have entered and pierced the heart of the affectionate Jesus—those wounds with which he has been wounded in the house of His friends. Are there none in these days who have eaten of the bread of Jesus? who have lived upon His bounty, been protected by His providence, warmed by His sun, enriched by His goodness, and delivered by His tenderness, who have nevertheless repaid His loving-kindness by lifting up their heel against Him? The expression, as you know, is taken from a wanton and ungrateful animal, which has been fed from his master's hands, and petted by his kindness, turning round and kicking the master who had fondled him;—and even such an instance of ingratitude and rebellion is spoken of as rare in the irrational animal, compared with His own people, with Israel. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know—my people doth not consider." The Lord contrasts the grateful and loving dumb beast with the thankless inconsiderate spirit of man, and assigns the superiority to the former. And are not we in many an instance amenable to the same charge of returning ingratitude for blessings vouchsafed, and injuries for mercies received?


I do not deny that the expressions, "apostate" and "traitor" are hard words, and that our thoughts naturally and appropriately recur to this unhappy one, who was so pre-eminently both. But what is an 'apostate?' Is he not one who withdraws from a company or society in which he was enrolled? one who has professed a love and zeal for a party or a cause, and has afterwards forsaken it and joined the opposite ranks? Is he not one who for a time has run well and lovingly with the people of God, has taken sweet counsel together with them, and gone to the house of God together, and has afterwards drawn back, and for love of the present world forsaken his early faith, has gradually walked in the counsel of the ungodly, then stood and looked on, as if approvingly, on the way of sinners, and at last sat down in the seat of the scornful, as casting in his lot among them. Is not such an one an apostate in heart, though he may still bear the name and wear the badge of Christ, and at times even appear to go with His people? And who is the "traitor" but he who is disloyal to his allegiance, unfaithful to his trust, a recreant to his engagement, a deserter from his standard? And have not we all enlisted under Christ's banner? Was it not the covenant engagement of our youth that we should "fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end? that we should

keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life?" And is there one of us, the youngest among us, and far less the oldest, who, as he looks back on the days that are gone, can say that he has "kept the ways of the Lord, and not wickedly departed from his God?" Alas! we have all reason to smite upon our hearts and say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

SECTION LXXVIII.

(Chapter xiii. verse 31 to the end.)

THERE is something very bewildering to our feeble and fallible understandings in the words which Jesus here uttered, in whatever sense we take them. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." Remember that these words were uttered by one who had just before announced that one of those very men who were sitting at table with Him should betray Him to death. He had marked out the very individual, and in holy indignation bade him do his guilty work quickly; and He had seen the detected culprit withdraw from the guest-chamber for the express purpose of executing his hellish treachery without delay. He knew, therefore, with the most



perfect accuracy all that was about to befall Him, even to the minutest item of degradation and shame. One might almost say that the infuriated cry of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" was even then ringing in His ears; that He heard the jests and the jeers of the scoffing priests as He hung despised and rejected between two malefactors; yet He makes not an effort to elude His fate. He sits at table as calm, as serene, as full of love and tenderness—nay, more abundantly so towards those who remained behind—as if no traitor had been in their ranks, and no denier nor coward still lingered there; and every word that falls from His lips, whether of exhortation or of prayer, is full of consolation and of promise. It is at this moment that He utters these words, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." In man's estimation it would have been considered as the hour of His lowest shame and deepest humiliation. As men were to gaze on His torn and bleeding brow, there would be no beauty to attract, no glory to call for admiration: His comeliness was more marred than any man's and whatever of dignity had belonged to Him was steeped and stained in the lowest dust. The very malefactors by His side presented no such spectacle of suffering as He did: *they* wore no crown of thorns, *their* brows streamed not with blood, no scoffs nor jeers were flung at *them* to mock their dying agonies; all the madness, and the fury, and the

bitterness of the people was concentrated against the holy Jesus ; and yet with all this in His view, with its immediate approach before His eyes, Jesus says, " Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." God, indeed, seeth not as man seeth. Through this dark vista of pain and suffering, and shame, there was indeed a glory which angels might well desire to look into : a ruined world redeemed, God's justice satisfied, God's law magnified, and yet God's mercy justified in its fullest overflow to perishing sinners.

There is something peculiarly awful in the thought that Judas had just left the room to consummate his sin, and that sin, humanly speaking, for the moment, at least, was a successful sin—successful to the pitiful extent of the reward which Judas coveted ; successful to the fullest extent that the malice and hatred of his enemies could desire ; and successful too, no doubt, so far as to remove even the fears of Satan ; and yet " herein," did Jesus say, " herein is my Father glorified." I do not speak now of the unity of purpose and will here signified, of both Father and Son alike glorified in the sufferings, which the justice of the One demanded, and the love and obedience of the other consented to endure ; but I would speak of God as glorified, not alone in the salvation wrought and won, but in the final discomfiture and treading under foot of all His foes, glorified in that act of justice which issues forth its righteous sentence,

“As for those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before mine eyes.” I would speak of sin successful, of guilt compassing its end, of crime accomplishing its purpose; and yet in that very success sealing the sinner’s ruin, and glorifying God’s truth and righteous indignation against sin. On that night Judas triumphed in his guilty baseness, the priests and Pharisees effected their atrocious outrage, and Satan himself might well believe he had gained his hellish end; and yet one and all were but carrying out “whatsoever the Lord’s hand and counsel had determined before to be done.” And yet at that moment how intensely did love predominate in the heart of Jesus! with what affectionate tenderness, as a father bequeathing his dying counsels to his surrounding children, does He address those who still tarried by His side as His “little children,” calling upon them in the most touching terms, and by the most urgent motives, to shew to a scoffing and ungenerous world that they were indeed disciples of a God of love, by the love they bore to one another: and how explicitly they obeyed the precept is recorded by those who, though they denied their faith, yet could not deny their love; and who, even while they persecuted, admired, and could not forbear exclaiming, “See how these Christians love one another!”

I do not wonder that Peter, when told by his

Master that He was about to go where neither he nor his brethren could follow Him as yet, mistaking his Lord's words, and thinking only that his love was questioned, his affection doubted, broke forth into that passionate exclamation, that he was ready to follow Him to prison or to death, to "lay down his life for His sake"—the truth and sincerity of which assertion the affectionate apostle so literally verified in after years. Nor did his Master doubt his fidelity even at the moment when He forewarned him of his fate; and as we learn from a preceding evangelist, touchingly alluded to his future services in the ministry by bidding him, when renewed and restored, to strengthen his brethren by the remembrance of his own weakness, and his testimony to that strength and power by which alone he had been "kept unto salvation."

SECTION LXXIX.


(Chapter xiv. verse 1—6.)

I HAVE many a time read this chapter, and especially this earlier portion of it, to the dying Christian—to one just ready to depart and take up his inheritance prepared for him, and be with Christ, so far better than to stay in this world of sorrow and suffering—and I have ever found that

these few first verses in particular, have produced a feeling much what I should conceive must have been the effect of the somewhat similar address of Jesus to His disciples on the stormy sea of Galilee, "Be not afraid; it is I." Every doubt would be dispelled, every fear hushed, every anxiety give way to certainty and assurance. They had, it is true, the bodily presence of Jesus: the departing pilgrim has His spiritual presence, and the blessed promises of this most touching chapter. Jesus does not say to the dying Christian as He said to His disciples when about to send them forth on their missionary errand, that they should take nothing for their journey, for He Himself, with all the carefulness of a tender parent, with the anxious vigilance of one seeking to provide against every want, here lays up such a store of provision by the way, that one might well declare His own prediction realized to every one, who can lay hold on these promises in Christ Jesus, that even while they are lingering on the verge—even before they actually enter the dark valley of the shadow of death—their Saviour's rod and staff is supporting them; nay, His own everlasting arms are beneath them, and His voice whispers "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

To the disciples, indeed, at this most sad crisis, it must have been most supporting and encouraging to hear these blessed truths from the lips of

their adored Master ; and many and many a time in their after career, during the stormy perils of their way, or in the approaching trial of martyrdom, must these precious assurances have been brought home by the Holy Spirit to their recollection with all the freshness of their earliest truth ; and the eye of faith must have pierced through the dark veil, and seen that Father's home, and those everlasting dwellings which Jesus had gone to prepare for those that love Him. Do we for a moment doubt whether there will be room for all ? It may be so here : an earthly country has frequently not had room for its overcrowding children ; and from age to age, as they have proved too numerous, she has sent them forth, one should not perhaps say as outcasts, but as supernumeraries whom she had not means to nourish. A family at times has outgrown a parent's means ; and when grown beyond childhood have been, not perhaps thrust out, but sent out to shift and provide for their own-selves, and by their own exertions. It is, it must be ever so, even though but three, or at most four generations can be crowding and treading on each other's heels : but in that " better country," in that " heavenly city," in that " new Jerusalem," in that home of our Father in heaven, all His children of every generation will be gathered there, from the tenants of Paradise to the last-born son and daughter : not one will be missing, not one overlooked, or left forgotten beneath the clods



of the valley, or the depths of the sea. They will come flocking in like doves to the windows, and as they knock it shall be opened unto them, and they shall enter in and dwell there, and go in and out and find pasture for evermore. "In my Father's house are many mansions," homes for all, homes for each; everlasting habitations that shall abide for ever: not like the crumbling tenements of earth, or the fleshly tabernacles, which were only meant to be taken down, but eternal in the heavens. I do not know, nor do I think we need inquire, whether any intimation is meant here of precedence in heaven, and that there are some of these mansions more glorious than others: if Jesus had intended at such a moment to intimate this, I think we should have had very different language;* but let not your hearts be troubled, all my children are dear to Me, all my redeemed ones will come to be united to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and shall sit down, not apart from, but with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, in my Father's kingdom; and where I am, there shall be my people also: I go to prepare a place for you. There need be no fear, no doubt, no anxious nor troubled heart: if it were otherwise, I would have told you. As I would not myself mislead, so neither would I have others mislead you. I

* There is indeed no ambiguity in other parts of Scripture,—
"One star differeth from another star in glory."—"Be thou ruler over ten cities—be thou ruler over five."

alone am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto my Father, nor to my Father's house, but by Me." And yet, alas ! how often, with these blessed words sounding in their ears, are men seeking other ways of access, other means of acceptance. How simply earnest and touching are these words of Jesus, 'If it were not so, I would have told you.' Yes, be assured, in that hour of overflowing love in which He was speaking such words of comfort to His sorrowing ones, He would have told them all that was needful to guide and uphold them by the way ; and though Thomas for a moment mistook His words, yet his very mistake, like his unbelief afterwards, has marked with more unerring clearness, that " Jesus alone is the way."

SECTION LXXX.

(Chapter xiv. verse 7—11.)

"No man hath seen God at any time," is the declaration of the word of truth ; and yet how natural the desire which is here expressed by Philip, " Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." It was the same desire which Moses had before expressed when he earnestly besought to see God's glory ; and yet in neither case was the request granted, nor was it at the same time withheld. The declaration that no man hath seen God at any time is in no degree invalidated, for no

man hath seen Him that is invisible, of whom the apostle declares that "He dwelleth in the light, which no man can approach unto," whom no man hath seen, nor can see: and yet it was no presumptuous feeling that induced Moses to say, "Shew me Thy glory;" nor was it any distrust of Jesus that led Philip to ask, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." I would rather ascribe the apostle's desire to somewhat of that holy ardour which led the Psalmist in times gone by so earnestly to exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee." There was, no doubt, ignorance and misconception in the apostle's words, but there was no lack of love in his wish, none in the desire and longing of his heart. It is the desire of every loving child to behold his father's face, to enjoy his presence, and to know the actual and personal love of a father's heart. That father may be in a distant land; seas may divide, and continents separate the child from the parent, and that from necessary and urgent motives; and though there may be no diminution in either's love, but rather an increase of it because of absence, and though every ship that traverses the ocean may bring tidings from the one to the other, yet the desire to see each other in the flesh, and to embrace and be folded to that father's bosom grows intenser every added year, and it may be that over every evidence of love that comes from

that father's hands, he may even weep because the hour of meeting and recognition is delayed.

There is something very touching in the rebuke which Jesus here gives to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known Me, Philip?" And how appropriately might such a reproach be addressed to many even in these days: we are, in many a respect, as ignorant and unaware of our gospel privileges as these apostles of our Lord before the day of Pentecost removed the veil from their eyes. I am afraid that we do not, any of us, sufficiently and practically recognize, as a precious truth never to be surrendered, and to be treasured in our inmost hearts, the unity of the Father with the Son; not alone in will and purpose, but in essence and Godhead. "I and my Father are one." We are apt to have confused and clouded notions on this subject: if not actually to separate the one from the other in our ideas, and even in our prayers, though offered in the name and through the mediation of Jesus, we do not realize that glorious truth, that the Father is in Christ, that in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and that He is not only the brightness of His glory, but the express image of His person. It is this which gives such mighty efficacy and agency to prayer; that He, in whose name it is offered, is Himself perfect God, though perfect man, and is therefore able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. Our Lord had

said to the Jews a short time before, "If ye had known Me, ye should have known my Father also." We cannot know God as a Father but through Christ; we cannot know Him as a God forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and keeping mercy for thousands, and as reconciled unto us, but through His name who has made reconciliation for us. God is a God that hideth Himself, save in and through Jesus Christ.

It is, however, a most valuable practical lesson which is here suggested to us in these words of our Lord, that He holds us accountable for those privileges He has vouchsafed to us, and that they are of themselves sufficient, if duly used, to lead us to all necessary knowledge and doctrine. Philip had been one of the earliest called of our Lord's followers. This evangelist relates his call in the first chapter of his gospel: he had attended Jesus ever afterwards, and with the exception of Peter, James, and John, seems to have been more prominently noticed than any other of the apostles. He had heard all that Jesus had said, he had seen all that Jesus had done: only a very short time before, when he himself would have introduced some Greeks to Jesus, he had heard that Saviour's prayer, "Father, glorify Thy name!" and had heard from out of heaven, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again!" Jesus had therefore been long with him, and he with Jesus; and the mighty works he had witnessed, had there been no

other evidence, might have convinced him that the Father had indeed glorified the Son by committing all power unto Him both in heaven and in earth. And has not Jesus been long time with us? Were we not baptized into His name in infancy? enlisted under His banner from childhood? and in His name professed to go forth to conquer all the enemies of our salvation? Has not His Holy Spirit been offered to take of the things of Jesus, and shew them unto us? and the Lord might indeed ask of us, as He asked of Israel of old, "What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" And can we, indeed, say that we do know Jesus as the true and living way, that we have built every hope on Him as the sure foundation, the rock that never can be shaken, and are looking forward with assured, yet humblest hope, to that hour when we shall know even as we are known, and see Him, no longer through the darkened veil of the flesh, but then face to face.

SECTION LXXXI.

(Chapter xiv. verse 12—14.)

WE have here, perhaps, a greater encouragement vouchsafed to us to perseverance in prayer than in any other passage of scripture. There are, no doubt, abundant promises, and some of the most

precious assurances, that the ears of the Lord are ever open to our prayers ; and there is an especial parable to instruct us that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint ;” but still with all this there is so much of infirmity, so much, if I may so speak, of unwillingness to take God at His word, that I cannot but fear that in many and many a season of prayer, we debar ourselves of the peace and comfort which the Lord intended us to receive, by our unbelief and distrust of God’s promise. Nor do I deny that when we look at ourselves, and enter into our own hearts, and see how full of sin and corruption they are, the feeling most natural must be to lie in the dust before God, and place one’s hand upon one’s mouth ; or if a broken word be uttered, the first and foremost that would issue from our lips would be the cry of the leper, “Unclean ! unclean !” And will the Lord hear, otherwise than to reject, our poor miserable prayers ? Can the sobbings of the out-cast, the groanings of the prisoner, or even “the sighing of the contrite, and the desire of the sorrowful,” be allowed to mingle with the hymns of seraphs, and the harps of angels ? Will the sounds of misery and sin be fitting accompaniments for the acclamations of heaven, and its songs of praise ? Yes, Jesus here assigns a reason far above and beyond our prayers, why God should hear and answer us ; and it is because His own glory and His Father’s glory are alike involved in

the success of sinners' prayers. Jesus, indeed, here speaks of the great achievements of prayer, when He promises His disciples that they should do greater works even than He Himself had done on earth: and how abundantly was this realized to them, even though in the midst of trial, of suffering, and of martyrdom! But are the triumphs of prayer exhausted? its achievements ended? Is God's ear become heavy, that it can no longer hear? or is the glory of His name no longer involved in fulfilling His own promise, that His ear is ever open to the prayers of His people? That plea will know no abatement on this earth, as long as man's misery continues to need redeeming love. It was used by the Old Testament saints with an holy jealousy, not only of the idolatry and wicked practices of those around them, but of the slightest reproach cast upon any of the Lord's doings. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name! O deliver us! O, be merciful to our sins for Thy name's sake! Wherefore should the heathen say, where is their God?" "I have been very jealous," said Elijah, "for the Lord God of Hosts." I do not know a more solemn consideration than this reflection, that God has, as it were, put His glory into our keeping, condescended to give it to us to use as a plea and an argument in our prayers; and I would have you remember, that as there was a

time when He forbade Israel for their wantonness any longer to make mention of His name—"Hold thy tongue, for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord"—so He may withdraw the privilege again, and His glory may be more furthered by refusing to hear than by listening. If, then, with the saints of old, and with our own church we use this plea, and acknowledging that we are justly punished for our offences, yet beseech Him favourably to hear our prayers for the glory of His name,* it is most especially incumbent on us to take heed that we tarnish not that glory by our own careless and inconsistent walking, or give occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully of that name through our heedlessness or misconduct: and amidst our infirmities and feebleness, our shortcomings and our misdoings, it is a blessed truth to know, that though such promise is annexed to prayer, it is still in Jesus' name that all is to be sought, and all is to be won. He leaves it to no inferior agent, He assigns us over to no lower intercessor, He bids us seek no other advocate, either with the Father or with Himself, but His promise is, "*I will do it.*" Blessed be the Lord for that gracious pledge and assurance of His own undying love and interest for poor sinners, of His never-absent presence, of His being always with His people, ever at hand even unto the end. It is to no canonized saint, nor holy

* Collect for Septuagesima Sunday.

virgin that He sends us ; it is not their prayers, but our own that are to enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth ; it is not their glory, nor their name, nor their merits that we must plead and make mention of : the charter of our gospel privileges runs not in their names, nor for their sakes ; it is not on the quicksand of another's righteousness, be he Paul or Peter, that we have to rest our hopes, or send up our prayers to heaven's throne in another's name—and that one as much needing, and as much rejoicing in the atoning blood and perfect righteousness of an all sufficient Saviour as ourselves—but “ whatsoever ye shall ask *in my name*, that will *I do*, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.” Precious words these for all God's children, be they in the north, or the south, in the east, or the west. Wherever it be that prayer goes up in the name of Jesus, there comes down at once the answer, “ I will do it.” And when we couple these words with what our Lord said afterwards, “ All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth,” he must be sadly ignorant of his privilege as a child, who should linger, as it were, in the ante-room of some lower servant to bespeak his favour and intercession, and not go boldly and at once by the appointed way into his father's presence, in the full confidence, that “ him that (so) cometh, He will in no wise cast out.”

SECTION LXXXII.

(Chapter xiv. verse 15—21.)

THESE words of consolation, and these promises of holy support and encouragement were addressed to the disciples, to those eleven who were sitting around the Paschal and sacramental table, and were hanging with intensest interest on every word that fell from their master's lips; but though primarily addressed, and earliest fulfilled to them, are they not equally intended for all the Lord's people everywhere, and in every age? We know, indeed, that Jesus is our intercessor in heaven; that He bears the names of His people on His heart, as the High Priest bore the names of the tribes of Israel on the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he went into the holy place for a memorial before the Lord continually. But how sweetly touching to hear from Jesus' own lips His promise to plead their cause before His Father, to take their wants, their cares, their sorrows, their infirmities—nay, "all their sins, negligences, and ignorances," as it were, into that Father's inner sanctuary, where He alone has admission, and there ask the Father for that gift of all gifts, which should so abundantly supply His own loss, and remain with them even unto the end, till He should again come and bless them

with His presence, or they should be themselves removed from this earth of suffering into those mansions where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore. It was a precious promise which we had yesterday, "whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do." It takes in every need, it takes in even this gift of the Comforter, for God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him: yet, as I said, there may be doubts, there may be fears, that our own prayers, so feeble, so imperfect, so stained, may not gain access to the Father's ear and heart, even though offered in that name of love so dear to that Father's heart; and therefore, with condescending tenderness, to make assurance doubly sure, He adds this gracious promise, "I (too) will pray the Father;" I will add my prayers to yours, and they shall go up in joint memorial before God. Not only in My name shall you be empowered to pray; but with mine own words, with mine own pleading, with mine own voice, will I pray the Father for you—not that your Father needs my earnest intercession, for "the Father Himself loveth you," and His love needs not to be importuned and urged, but the gift for which I shall plead is especially the fruit of My work. While I remain in bodily presence among you, you need no other comforter—your master's love, your master's presence are alone sufficient to bear you up under present trials; but the time is even now at hand

when I must be taken from you, and though for a little moment I shall return and tarry a while longer upon earth, yet my earthly mission is all but closed, my sojourn among you almost at an end, and then when I re-ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God, bearing on my hands and feet, and pierced side, the wounds I have received, when I shall go up on high, bearing captivity captive, it is that I may receive gifts for men, for you and for all who shall hereafter believe in my name.

It was a blessed and early realization of the Lord's promised intercession for His people: even before He quitted them, before He re-assumed His seat at the right hand of God, He is interceding for them for the most precious gift He had to give. "I will ask." He was, in fact, Himself in this respect executing the office of the Comforter, and providing for that hour of bereavement and separation which was so soon to come. We may observe too, I think, in these verses how beautifully Christ fulfils His three-fold character of Prophet, Priest, and King. As Priest, He declares His purpose of entering into the Holiest with prayer and supplication for them and in their behalf, "I will ask;" and the sacrifice He was about to offer, and the blood He was about to shed, would ensure His Father's acceptance of the intercession. As King, He was about to return triumphant to His throne in heaven; but He

would not leave them comfortless in His absence, but would send His Holy Spirit to carry on His gracious work on earth, and seal and anoint as His all that should believe in Him ;—and as Prophet, He leaves His parting instructions, and teaches us that all His promises are inseparably connected with holy obedience. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.” It is a blessed union—love and service—and in fact the only one that can render service acceptable. We may, perhaps, imagine a man offering, as the prophet phrases it, “thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil,” or even surrendering, as many an idolater did, “his first born for his transgressions, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul.” But we might well ask, “Will the Lord be pleased with such? Will He accept sacrifices, however costly, however painful, as atonement and expiation of man’s sin, or as testimony of man’s love?” God asks the heart, and where that prompts the service, be it but “a turtle dove, or a young pigeon, how sweet the offering which thanksgiving consecrates; and how precious the reward that follows: “He shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him.” It is far otherwise with human service: in God’s service we must be His children before we can be His servants—it is the child’s love that can render obedience acceptable, or service well-pleasing.

SECTION LXXXIII.

(Chapter xiv. verse 22—26.)

OUR Lord here, in reply to the question of Jude, now distinctly points out the connection that exists between love and obedience, and the blessed result of that union. It is a very important subject, far more important than we are apt to imagine; and therefore, though I just alluded to it in the preceding verses, I would press the matter more home to all our hearts, as one in which we are all equally interested. It is service from each of us that God demands; and whether in our station on earth we be masters or servants, we are all alike in this, that we have a Master in heaven, who not only expects and claims our service, but has condescended to teach us how it may be a willing, and faithful, and entire service—a service of the heart and not of the hand—heart-service, not eye-service. I suspect that very great mistakes and misapprehensions exist on this subject, and that many of the Lord's people go mourning all their days in the vain endeavour to test their obedience by the exalted and unattainable requirements of the law. We are apt to take human service as our guide; and though we all know that the service of love is the willing service, and that the heart and its affections are the real prompters

to untiring, unflagging obedience, yet it is rarely so in the service which one man receives, and another man pays to a fellow-creature. There are so many motives to human service; it is generally a matter of bargain, of convenience, necessity, self-interest, future expectations that are all ingredients in the service one man pays to another. It may be indeed, and I gladly acknowledge that it often is, that after a time, after a more perfect and intimate knowledge of each others qualities, love and esteem may arise and continue between the parties, and that which was at first a mere service of bargain and mutual convenience may become the willing obedience of an attached and grateful heart: and many a master, amid much of blessing, has had reason to thank God for that especial domestic blessing, a faithful and affectionate servant, and, like Philemon of old, has henceforth looked upon him, "not as a servant, but above a servant; a brother beloved, both in the flesh and in the Lord."

And assuredly it is very natural to ask, why may not the same process exist with regard to our obedience to God? Why may we not seek first to obey, and then find the reward of our obedience in the love that will spring up in our hearts? Our Lord, however, you see, here inverts the process—love first, and obedience afterwards; let the impulse of love be first and foremost in the heart, and it will issue out in all obedience. We must

have the love of children in our hearts before we can attain to the obedience of servants ; in other words, as I said last night, we must be children of God before we can be servants of God. Human analogy would indeed suggest the very reverse, many a servant has been adopted into the family of man : it was so, for a time, with Abraham, when he looked on his faithful Eliezer as his heir ; and though in the parable of the prodigal son, the young man, in the depth of his humiliation, would have said to his father, " Make me as one of thy hired servants," yet a father's love would not listen to the proposition, but restored him to a child's place in his heart and household. But still you may ask, *Why* cannot service precede love ? Simply because there can be no service at all, no obedience that is acceptable to God, which does not proceed from love, and that a love, not like human love, which springs from instinct, from gratitude, from passion, or from congeniality of temper or of will ; there is no such love in our hearts, nor can any such spring up in them by nature towards God ; for the carnal mind—that is, every man's heart by nature, your heart and mine—is only enmity against God ; and not one can love God till that love is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. You see, therefore, at once how utterly irreconcilable is the idea of obedience and service in a heart at enmity with God. I do not deny that many a

one, from a principle of fear, or it may be a sort of undefined desire to please God, and entitle himself to the wages of service, has paid a kind of obedience to God's law, and has thought to propitiate his Creator by a rigid adherence to what he believes to be His will, and might, perhaps, at the last, churlishly demand of God, "Pay me that thou owest;" or it might be, like the slothful and unprofitable servant, bring back his talent, as he thinks, undiminished, and say, "Lo! there thou hast that is thine;" or, like the son in the parable, with plausible protestations of obedience, he may say, "I go, sir," but he goes not. In fact, it would be endless to enumerate all the varieties of defective service which proceed from an unloving, and therefore unwilling heart: whereas true and loving service is like that lengthened one which the patriarch paid to Laban for his daughter Rachel, "It seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." Love asks not how long the service may last—it rejoices in the thought, that as on this earth it knows no pause, and needs no interval of rest, so "before the throne of God they serve Him day and night in His temple;" far less does it ask, how *little* fidelity may require, but rather how *much* love can do to testify the motive from which it works; and with the gushing affection of the Psalmist, is continually breaking forth into that passionate exclamation, "Oh! how

I love thy law—it is my meditation all the day.” Surely we may say of the heart of such an one, “It is meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work;” and to him especially may the words of Jesus apply, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto Him, and make our abode with Him.”

SECTION LXXXIV.

(Chapter xiv. verse 27 to the end.)

It is a blessed legacy which Jesus here bequeaths to His disciples, and through them, to every succeeding generation of His people, even to the end of time. It is generally a moment of intense interest and suspense when a dying man announces to expecting relatives and friends the purport of his bequests; and our Lord here contrasts the conduct of the world on such occasions with His own. I do not, however, imagine that the purport of Jesus was to depreciate the testimonies of affection and regard bequeathed by dying friends to their survivors: they are often valuable, generally gratifying, and, though sometimes disappointing, yet seldom, if ever, repudiated or rejected with indifference or disregard. The contrast to which Jesus here points, is in the

value of the legacy itself, which differs as much as the earthly and the heavenly race, in which a corruptible crown is the prize of the one, and an incorruptible the meed of the other. The world's bequests are and must be of the earth, earthy: they are sometimes, too, like those gifts of the ancients, which were said to be no gifts,* because they often prove fatal to the possessor; they are, too, very often a source of disquietude, vexation, and disappointment, as not realizing the expectations and fancied claims of the receiver; and under all circumstances, they relate only to this world's goods, and must in their turn be left behind to some new expectant, and, it may be, some longing successor. Such are the general phases of the world's bequests and legacies; and truly, therefore, and gratefully may we say of the legacy of Jesus, "Not as the world giveth, giveth He" unto His friends. When Peter and John looked on the poor cripple at the beautiful gate of the temple, the former said to him, as he gazed earnestly upon him, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee." The world has nothing but its silver and its gold, its corroding and perishing things, which moth and rust do corrupt; but Jesus, though all the treasures on the earth, and beneath the earth are His, may well say, "Silver and gold give I none to those I love

* Δωρα αδωρα.

best," but "peace be on them, and mercy on the Israel of God." It was the earliest announcement from angels' lips when Jesus was born into the world, "on earth, peace;" and now that He is about to depart out of this world, and go unto His Father, almost the last words from His own lips are, "My peace I give unto you," and well might He repeat His gracious declaration, "Let not your heart be troubled," with the addition, "neither let it be afraid." There was indeed very little of peace such as the world giveth, to those to whom He bequeathed this legacy: every man's hand almost was against them, though their's was only lifted up to bless, and to announce blessed tidings; and yet even to them—to those very ones of whom one of their after number said from his own experience, that "if in this life only they had hope, they were of all men the most miserable"—even to them was its truth most entirely realized; and the same experience could testify for himself, as no doubt the rest could gladly say, "that none of these things moved them, neither counted they their life dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy—to testify the Gospel, the good tidings of the grace of God." It is the work in which the blessed Trinity are unitedly engaged; if it be "peace from God our Father," it is also "peace from our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the fruit of the Spirit is peace." It was one of the predicted titles of Jesus that He should be called

the Prince of Peace, and His gospel itself is called "the Gospel of peace," wherewith our feet are to be shod.

But the blessedness and the richness of this legacy must be felt in the Christian's own heart ere he can appreciate its value : it is so independent of all outward objects and circumstances, it soars so far out of sight of all worldly and fleeting ties, and, like the ladder vouchsafed unto the Patriarch in his dream, though its lower end may be resting on earth, the ascending spirit has reached its topmost height in heaven ; and, not unfrequently, its most triumphant exhibition has been, not merely in the dungeon or the stocks, but at the rack of the victim, and the stake of the martyr. It is true, blessed be God, we do not now see, in our own land at least, men or women tortured for the truth, and triumphant over torture ; but we may still see the Christian saint in his last hour, and perhaps the first and the last question which anxious love asks of the dying one is, "Is it peace?" and does not a smile of grateful assurance lighten up the pallid features as the words faintly fall, "Peace with God through Jesus Christ." I have said of this world's legacies, that they are only for this world : it is not only over the members of our own communion, but over every one that dieth, be he Dives, or be he Lazarus, that God's inspired words may be truly uttered, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain

we can carry nothing out;” “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.” But it is not so with the bequest of Jesus—it is enjoyed, and richly too, even in this life; but here it is only the time of “the first ripe grapes;” the full-grown ripened cluster, pressed out of heaven’s own vintage, and drunk new in the kingdom of God, is the Saviour’s legacy in its richest form, and its choicest flavour. There may be, even with inward peace, many ills on earth, many sorrows, many tears, many heavings of the heart in sadness, sickness, suffering, loss of friends, rendings of closest ties, painful partings, and goings before of those we love; but in heaven “all is well.” I do not know that I was ever more struck with the simplicity of a Christian’s epitaph, than with one in my own churchyard, over one early called to Jesus :

“Is it well with thee?” “It is well.”

SECTION LXXXV.

(Chapter xv. verse 1—8).

THE last words of the last chapter were “Arise, let us go hence.” It has been generally supposed that upon this our Lord arose, and with His disciples quitted the guest-chamber, where He had eaten with them the Paschal supper, and instituted

the sacramental supper in its place, and that He thence proceeded to the Mount of Olives, where the rest of His discourse was delivered, and that most sublime prayer in the 17th chapter offered up ; and that from the Mount of Olives He passed over the brook Cedron to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was betrayed. The only reasons, I believe, for these inferences are the words, "Arise, let us go hence," and the circumstance that the imagery with which our Lord commences this chapter is that of a vine, the Mount of Olives being thickly planted with that tree, and therefore suggesting the image to His mind. It is not, perhaps, a matter of much moment where the discourse was delivered, and the prayer offered up ; its holy truths are not altered, nor the affectionate fervour of the Saviour's heart diminished by the locality in which the one were taught, or the other poured forth ; and yet I am inclined to think that Jesus still tarried in the guest-chamber. He had said, indeed, "Arise, let us go hence," and might for a moment make a movement to depart, yet His heart was so full of His theme, it so overflowed with tenderness and love to those whom He was addressing for the last time before His crucifixion, that He seems still to have lingered yet awhile, and continued His discourse to its close in the same room. And as to the image of the vine, I can hardly consider that, as in this instance at least, indicative of the

locality in which He was; for He had already spoken of a vine, and that undoubtedly in this very room, when He had said to them, "Henceforth I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine till I shall drink it new in My Father's kingdom." It is the same image here, the fruit-bearing vine, but of course with a different application and reference. Here Christ Himself is the Vine; they that are Christ's are the branches. The subject is union with Christ; and we may indeed say, "Great is the mystery of Godliness," and that "Our life is hid with Christ in God." The very image here presented to our notice reminds us of this. You remember the apostle's expression to denote a Christian's standing, firm and stable as the everlasting hills, "rooted in Christ;" but the root is hidden from our view, we see not the process, though we know that from that root proceeds all the vigour and verdure of the plant, and that if, as in the case of Jonah's gourd, even so small a thing as a worm gnaw the root, and intercept the sap, it withers and dies. The truthfulness and reality of the image meets us every day: we see the living and flourishing branch in its various stages, just like human life, putting forth its leaves, and in its tender buds giving early promise of the future fruit. We see it afterwards clustering with produce, and rich with its abundant harvest; or we see a dead and unsightly branch, disfiguring to the tree, and offensive to our sight.

It has been said that a vine—with us at least—is a poor and insignificant tree, and may, therefore, be in some sense a fitting emblem of the mean, earthly condition of the Saviour, but I cannot think that there was any such meaning here, nor indeed that an oriental vine bearing such gorgeous and glorious clusters as that of Eshcol, and so often introduced in scripture to illustrate much that was beautiful and lovely, could be selected to depict the lowly condition of Jesus. The image would seem rather to have been chosen to illustrate the fertility of one united to Christ, as well as being so familiar to the senses of those to whom it was addressed. They had seen one dead branch cut out and cast off; Judas had already quitted the room. “*Now ye are clean,*” says their Lord. It is true he had before appeared as much united as the rest; and so does many a one who is joined by merely outward ordinances, as a branch may be nailed to a wall, yet form no part of the wall, nor derive nourishment from the wall, any more than a mere member of the church by outward membership is thereby a member of the church of Christ, or derives nourishment from the outward ordinance which has admitted him into seeming fellowship with the church. The true test is that which our Lord here applies, Are they fruit bearers? Are they bearing the fruits of Christian fellowship, and Christian grace? the fruits of the Holy Spirit? All Christ’s branches, all His people bear fruit:

there is no such anomaly as a barren fruit-tree in the Lord's vineyard or garden. He plants it for fruit, He tills it and takes care of it for fruit; He waters it with the rain and dew of His Holy Spirit, He enriches it with the sunshine of His grace, that it should bring forth fruit; in fact, what more could be done to God's vineyard to enable it to bear fruit than He has done in it? And He expects fruit, He comes seeking fruit; and, more than all, He condescends to tell us that "herein is His Father glorified, if it bear much fruit." Does such a declaration astound us? that any fruit from such dry, worthless, sapless, stunted branches as man can redound to the glory of the God of heaven? Can He who inhabiteth eternity, in whose sight the very heavens are unclean, and who chargeth His angels with folly, derive glory from the miserable abortions of man's feeble growth? Yes, it is even so; for He says it who knows both the *heights* of God and the *depths* of man, who is God blessed for evermore, and yet was found in fashion as a man. He has left on record this wondrous declaration, that "herein is My Father glorified, if ye bear much fruit." And why is this? Because in every fruit of holy growth, puny though it be, He recognizes of His own, His own seed, His own sowing, His own tillage, "rooted in Christ," and growing up into "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."

SECTION LXXXVI.

(Chapter xv. verse 9—17).

OUR Lord had spoken in the preceding verses of the fruit-bearing qualities of His disciples; and He here specifies one most lovely fruit growing on the tree of Christian grace, far richer than the cluster of Eshcol borne from the land of promise, or the produce from the vineyards of Engedi. And it is love—love springing from God's love to us as the root. The first love indeed which is mentioned is the love which the Father bore to Jesus, and yet so great was that Father's love and tender compassion for poor sinners, that even this beloved Son He freely surrendered to die for a guilty world. Such was the Father's love: "God *so* loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son;" and was the Son's love for poor sinners a whit behind His Father's? In the everlasting councils of Jehovah that Son's voice was heard, "Lo, I come, I delight to do Thy will, O my God:" and if the Father was ready to give, the Son was as ready to lay down His own life, that "whosoever believeth on Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." And it is from these two conjoined motives that Jesus here sets before us a pattern whereby He would have our love one to another moulded: "As the Father hath loved Me," "as I have loved you." And with what

significancy of meaning is that manifestation of His love mentioned! "Greater love hath no man than this, that He lay down His life for His friends;" and in a few short hours the love of Jesus would be so sealed. It was no idle boast of man's love, or man's endurance—it was no possible, but still improbable fact to which He alluded, and which might never come to pass—it was no event, meditated indeed and designed by hostile men, but which a thousand accidents might thwart, or the scantiest prudence escape; but the hour was already at hand, it was the very sacrifice planned before the world was, and foreshadowed in every type from the hour of its guilty fall; it was the very deed for which Jesus had just dismissed the traitor with an injunction to do it quickly, and which He well knew fiends on earth and dæmons in hell were even then banded together to bring to pass. I do not deny that man, and perhaps oftener woman, has laid down, and been more frequently willing to lay down, their lives, that one dear to them as their own soul might be spared. I know that many a loyal loving heart, in the hour of conflict and peril, has shed its own life-blood that his chief or sovereign might escape: but there is that in the scene at Gethsemane and on Calvary, there is that in the darkened heavens and the shattered temple, that takes the sacrifice offered there far away from the pale of human love, or human suffering. How solemn then the

adjuration, even at the moment He uttered it, to "love one another *as* He had loved them." How thousand-fold more solemn must that adjuration have come upon their softened memories, when actually attested by His dying agony, and sealed with His own blood! I do not ask you, "Do you love Jesus?" for I am sure that at this moment the answer of each one's heart would be like that of the forgiven and restored Peter, "Lord! Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee;" but I do ask you, "Do you love one another, even as Jesus loved you?" Is there no unkindness one towards another, no rankling, no jealousy, no heart-burning, no remembering of petty injuries, no resentment of greater wrong? Nay, I would go even lower, and say, is there, not merely, no unkindness in the heart, but is there none in the looks nor in the speech—no peevishness in the temper—no sullenness in the countenance—no hastiness in the words? "As I have loved you." Oh what an ample margin for love to expatiate in, for charity to find its widest scope, and yet be immeasurably below the divine original! Even in human service it is often a service of love, and after a lapse of years it is not unfrequently exalted from its lowlier sphere into that of friend and companion; but how far more sweetly does Jesus blend the lower title with the higher, not to the extinction of the one in the higher privilege of the other, but in the blessed union

of the active obedience of the servant with the ennobling character of the friend. And yet which of the Lord's people would use even the liberty wherewith Christ hath here made them free, and consent to forego the name and condition of a servant of Christ? Would Moses or Daniel, think you, forego the proud distinction of "a servant of God," or Paul, or James, or Peter, covet a higher title? And Jesus has here pronounced the most perfect obedience the test of the truest friendship, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." We may be assured that real friendship waits and watches with as untiring an eye as ever service can, to anticipate and fulfil the wishes of him it loves—friendship, no more than service, can shrink from ought that can testify and approve its reality and truth, though I do not deny that the most precious reward and the dearest privilege is when the master graciously condescends to call him his friend whom he first chose and took to himself as his servant.

SECTION LXXXVII.

(Chapter xv. verse 18 to the end.)

It was well that our Lord laid the foundation of all genuine Christian obedience in love, for we find from the present portion of the chapter, that


to follow Christ is to follow Him through persecution and suffering, and nothing but love will stand that trial. "I know it is the truth," said one to whom martyrdom was threatened, "but I cannot burn for it." "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," was the resolution of one who had not counted the cost, or at least knew not the path through which Jesus was to guide His followers, and thought that the way of Christian duty was but as a summer's stroll. Orpah set out with Ruth, and went a certain distance towards Israel, but at length shrank from the poverty and reproach that awaited her, and returned to Moab and idolatry; and so Demas too, having walked with God, and companied with Paul, yet, through love of the present world, went back and forsook his master. And still more fatally the wife of Lot, though warned and even guided by an angel, looked back on guilty ties and associations, and found her punishment in her guilt. At first it does not seem so hard to follow Jesus—we are apt to mistake excitement, sensibility, or some equally transient impulse for that enduring love, which shrinks from no danger, and is as ready to encounter contumely and reproach as those more stirring conflicts, which demand all our energy, and shed a lustre even over defeat. It is comparatively easy to do this; but to follow Jesus to shame, to contempt, and scorn—to be reviled as He was reviled, and spit upon as

He was spit upon—to be looked upon and treated as a malefactor, and die a felon's death—and to be not merely resigned, but cheerful; not only to “take joyfully the spoiling of goods,” and to be “made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions,” but to be triumphant amid the fires of martyrdom, or the ignominy of the scaffold; and even there to see, with the dying saint, heaven opened, and Jesus with His holy angels coming to meet him, to lead him to the marriage-supper, there to drink with his beloved Redeemer the cup of joy and gladness. These are conflicts which faith and love alone can sustain. But these are not the every-day trials of the Christian disciple; and we may perhaps never be called upon for such costly evidences of our love; but there is still the enmity of the world, that never abates, never lessens, for the prince of this world knows no pause in his hostility against the God who created it, and the Saviour who redeemed it, and therefore none in his hatred towards those who tenant it. It is true, the world is not at this moment so open in its hostility, though to the full as deadly in its hatred: like its lord and master, Satan, who—

“ — more wisely than he did before,
Now tempts by making rich, not making poor,”

so the world no longer seeks to drive a man from his religion by open assault or avowed insult. The

fact is the world has rather assumed a religious and decent character, and pays a deferential respect to religious appearances; but it is all the time undermining, and, under the plea of liberality and freedom from prejudice, making great displays of regenerating the world without the aid of religion. And I would say to you, be very suspicious of any of the world's offers, which has not religion for its basis. It will offer education, but under the pretext of not wounding the scruples of any, would exclude the religion of all; it will offer to you the exaltation of human reason, but on the ruins of the Word of God. The infidels of earlier times did Satan's dirty work in their day by open ribaldry and profane invective and daring assault against the Bible; but he works by no such instruments now, they are thrown aside as used up and worthless; but has he therefore paused in his attacks—is there a lull in his hostility—is he resting on his weapons? Not for a moment; he has only changed his tactics, and instead of pulling the Bible by main force from man's hands all at once, would covertly and gradually draw away truth after truth, and by insinuating here a little, and there a little, removing this prop and undermining that, and suggesting his own substitutes as more flattering and more congenial to human pride, he is hoping, not indeed to destroy God's Word, for that he knows to be indestructible, but to drag man down with



his crumbling edifice of human reason into the same abyss, into which his own restless pride has cast himself. When Jesus here says to His disciples, "If the world hate you," He is not putting an imaginary case, which might or might not occur; there would be no more escape for them that should follow than there had been for Himself, who had trod the same path before them. The world had hated Him without a cause, and the world would hate them too with an equally unfounded hatred. But though that world would persecute them as it had persecuted Jesus, and in this respect there would be no distinction between the servant and his Lord, yet what a difference to tread the wine-press of God's wrath and man's fury alone, and to tread in the track consecrated by the footsteps of Him they loved, and to recognize in every step, and as it were by every drop of blood, the traces of a Saviour's path! When indeed the Saviour entered on that "bloody way," it was said of Him, that there would "be none to help, none to uphold;" but for them He loved how far otherwise did He provide! they were not left comfortless, with none to help, none to uphold; and how sweetly, how securely is that promise of the Comforter, sealed as it were by all the persons of the blessed Trinity; all engaged, all agents, all pledged to the work of comforting those whom Jesus loved. "The *Comforter*, even *the Spirit of Truth*, whom *I will send from the*

Father, which proceedeth from *the Father*, *He* shall testify of *Me*," of the love I have shewn you, of the salvation I have wrought for all whom the Father hath given Me.

SECTION LXXXVIII.

(Chapter xvi. verse 1—6.)

It is sad to think there should be so much of unkindness, of bitterness and wrong, nay, our Lord's words intimate, of even cruelty and outrage, under the semblance and pretext of religious zeal. It is the Chief Shepherd alone, whose love is unwearying, and His tenderness unabated; who never over-drives, and if He sees one of His sheep heavy laden with young, or one of His lambs, the little ones of His flock, feeble and footsore, and unable to keep up with the rest, He gently leads them, or, still more lovingly, carries them in His bosom. It is those, whose own the sheep are not, who are harsh and unkind, and who exercise so little tenderness, and in reality have no genuine sympathy either with the flock itself or the owner of it, though they may pretend so much. It was the same with the Church of old, as represented in the Book of Canticles: her Lord (and her Lord is our Lord) had too withdrawn Himself—it may be, she had in some degree undervalued His pre-

sence, and appreciated not His worth—but now He was absent, and sorrow had filled her heart, and she set out to find Him; she sought Him, but she could not find Him; she called Him, but He gave her no answer; and then it was that the watchmen, who went about the city, found her, and smote and wounded her; the keepers of the walls took away her veil from her, and no doubt thought they were engaged in the work of duty, and were doing the city much service. They had no sympathy with her, who was seeking Him whom her soul loved; and had their feelings been investigated, it would have been found they had as little with Him whom she was seeking. It was the same here: our Lord in much tenderness warns His disciples of the treatment they will receive at the hands of the watchmen of their Zion: and that to such lengths will their zeal run, that they will even think it meritorious and a service to the God of love to kill and to burn and to destroy His servants, and that too with as prompt a zeal as if they were leading a victim ready garlanded as a sacrifice to the altar. Well might Jesus add, “And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor Me.” Ignorance of God and of His holy attributes, ignorance of His character, and unacquaintedness with the purposes for which Jesus came into the world, is no doubt the prevailing cause of all those errors, which so mar and mutilate true religion.

It was long ago the complaint of God, "thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," and men have not blushed to use the name of God to sanction the most atrocious deeds: and even now "to do God service" is the plea under which so much of bitterness, and a rankling spirit, and acrimonious opposition is still stirred up in the hands of angry disputants and heated controversialists. But I do not need to dwell on this. I would rather say, that the true cause of sin, of all the sin in the world, of our own sin, yours and mine, the sin of our hearts and our lives, all spring from the same source—ignorance of God and perversion of His Word. It has ever been so—it was so with the sinners of the old world, "they *knew not* till the flood came;" even in its wisdom the world knew not God; and this evangelist records of Jesus, that though "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, yet the world knew Him not. There was much of ignorance even in John himself, and his fellow disciples, even while Jesus was thus speaking to them: they knew not the necessity of the atoning blood of Jesus, they knew not the mighty ends for which that blood was to be shed; they would in their ignorance have still retained their master by their side, as if His presence alone were comfort, and His departure sorrow. Even the very purpose for which Jesus was announcing these predicted sufferings of Himself and of them, was mistaken;

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and though He so distinctly declared that He had told them these things, that, when they did occur, they might prove no stumbling block of offence, and that they might be strengthened and encouraged in the reflection that all things were alike foreknown and foreseen by Him, yet still, because He had told them, and even while He was telling them, sorrow had filled their hearts. He had, indeed, before told them, in no unequivocal terms, of the persecution, reproach, and shame that should befall them; but while He was with them, and while in fact the brunt of the malice and opposition of His enemies fell on Jesus, and not on themselves, they little regarded the warning; but now that the same tidings were repeated, accompanied with the conviction that their master was indeed about to depart from them, they seem to have been so stupified as not even to ask Him, "Whither goest Thou?" Perhaps they feared to learn the truth; and yet that truth would have set them free from all their sorrow: to know that the departure of Jesus was but the herald of richer blessings and more abundant consolation than ever His presence had bestowed. And is it not often so with ourselves? Do we not forbear to ask of many a trial for what purpose it has been sent, and on what errand it is going, lest we should find that its present course is to be marked by disappointment and loss? and yet that loss is so often and so truly the Christian's gain! It was the loss, the

absence of Jesus that filled the hearts of these disciples with so much of sorrow. Had they but realized that He was returning to that glory which He had with the Father from everlasting, even their selfish love would have hesitated to detain Him ;—and does not many an affectionate heart in its first burst of grief and bereavement, feel that the void never can be filled up, the loss never supplied? How tenderly does Jesus console these sorrowing ones here with the promises of another and more abiding Comforter; and how, too, with equal sympathy and love does He speak peace to all earth's mourners, even under the most heart-rending separations, and the breaking up of the dearest ties, assuring, it may be, a bereaved parent, that "there is a name better than of sons and daughters;" or lovingly saying to the heart-broken widow, "Thy Maker is thy Husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name."

SECTION LXXXIX.

(Chapter xvi. verse 7—15.)

JESUS here tells His disciples that His departure from them was no real desertion, nor forsaking of them; that it was in reality expedient and necessary that He should return on high to His Father, bear-

ing captivity captive in order to receive gifts for men ; and that the first and best gift, the pledge of His having entered within the veil, and that the sacrifice had been accepted, the atonement made, and the redemption completed, would be that He would send the Holy Spirit. It may, perhaps, have suggested itself to our minds, why could not the Comforter come without Jesus returning to heaven to send Him ? What necessary connection did there exist between the departure of the one, and the coming of the other ? and why could not Jesus have remained on earth awhile, and yet the Comforter have joined Him in His holy work of evangelizing the world ? I would at once say in answer to these, or any such suggestions, that we must not presumptuously enter into the purposes of God, nor by searching attempt to find out the Almighty in the deep waters of His inscrutable will. The Holy Spirit was the purchase of Christ's death, and His being sent into the world was the pledge that that purchase was accepted, the ransom paid, the debt discharged, and the prisoner set free. Had Jesus, therefore, not died the death of the cross, the debt had been unpaid, the sentence would have been still in force against man, and the whole work and purpose of redeeming love left unfulfilled. It was when Jesus ascended up on high, when His attendant hosts of angels knocked at the portals of heaven with the triumphant cry, "Open ye the gates of righteousness, that the

King of Glory may come in!" it was then that Jesus claimed at His Father's hands the cancelling of the handwriting that was against us. It had been already nailed to His cross, and Jesus bears it up to heaven, stained and sealed with His own blood, and claims all its mighty consequences of love and solace to reconciled man. Jesus ascends to heaven, and His Spirit descends to earth; the first and foremost gift of Messiah's victory, the pledge of His love, and of His abiding with His people for ever. Had Jesus remained on earth as man, He could have been but in one place; He never quitted the narrow limits of the land in which He lived: from Judea to Galilee, and from Galilee to Judea, was the utmost extent He traversed; and how could it be otherwise, while clothed upon with the trammels of an earthly body? But now His spirit is in heaven and in earth, and fills all space: like God's sun, "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and His circuit unto the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." At the same instant He is here and everywhere; in the church at large, and in the heart of every individual believer; and is not this a glorious exchange from the limited bodily presence of Jesus to the Spirit of God here and everywhere present, executing His appointed work of convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and thereby laying the only true foundation of peace and consolation?

It is true, you may say, that to convince of sin, at least, is a strange way to speak peace or comfort to a sinner's soul, and yet it is the only way. The sinner, no doubt, is often ready to cry peace, peace to his own soul, when there is no peace, and God has said, "There is no peace to the wicked;" but still, after all, the first step in the way of peace is conviction of sin; the first advance in the progress of healing is to place the finger on the plague-spot of the disease, and lay it bare; and this is especially the work of the Holy Spirit, "He shall convince of sin." Sin unrepented, sin gloried in, sin boasted of, is no work of the Holy Ghost, and may be classed among those sins of which the apostle says that they "are open beforehand, going before to judgment;" but wherever the Spirit works, where holiness unto the Lord is being built up, the foundation, if I may so speak, is laid *in the dust*, in bringing the sinner to lie low in the dust at the foot of that cross on which Jesus hung; and this leads by its necessary consequence to the same Spirit's next work of "conviction of righteousness," the renunciation of the creature's righteousness as not merely worthless and unprofitable, but as sinful and offensive in the sight of God; not only as "rags," but as "filthy rags," and the substitution and imputation of that better righteousness, "even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." And how truly does the apostle lay

the foundation in the same "conviction of sin," when he adds, "for there is no difference, for all have sinned!"

But in what way does our Lord's reason—"because I go to the Father"—bear upon the inference He draws? Was it necessary for Him personally to plead with His Father that His righteousness might be accepted in the sinner's stead? Was the Father's heart unwilling to pardon, or slow to accept the ransom that had been paid? Assuredly not—but it was needful that Jesus should "go away," and bear with Him up to heaven, and lay, as it were, at His Father's feet, the pledges of His victory in His resurrection and ascension, and point to the wounds He had purposely borne with Him into heaven, and demand for them the full amount of His purchase; and as the Father saw His returning Son, He might indeed say, not of Him alone, but of all His ransomed and redeemed ones, "This my Son was dead, and is alive again;" and well might His angelic host respond, "He hath done marvellous things: with His own right hand, and with His holy arm hath He gotten Himself the victory."

There is still another work of the Holy Spirit: to reprove or convince the world of judgment; and like the Gospel itself, it will be either a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death. It is not to the last day to which this judgment of the Holy Spirit is referred, though no doubt in

that day of final adjudication and righteous apportionment, the Holy Spirit will sit as assessor in the great assize; but there is even in this world a blessed and consolatory, as well as a fearful and overwhelming verdict on every man's way of life. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits," and that witness may, and must be, either for or against us. The testimony of the world and of the Spirit is ever at variance: the world lifts up its voice against Christ's disciples, while the Spirit's verdict is that they are the children of God;—and again, the world's testimony is in favour of those of whom the Spirit says, "I know you not." It is a solemn inquiry which each one of us ought to ask himself, "What is the Spirit's testimony concerning me?"

SECTION XC.

(Chapter xvi. verse 16—22.)

THE words which Jesus here addressed to His disciples are very simple in themselves, and yet one can hardly wonder that His meaning greatly perplexed them. He had, indeed, announced His approaching death, and they might perhaps comprehend, even in spite of their wishes to the contrary, how He should soon be taken from them, and they should see Him no more; but He

here adds to His declaration, that yet but a little time more, and they should see Him again. To what did He refer? Would He elude the malice of His enemies, and after a brief period of concealment, again rejoin them, and thus turn their sorrow into joy? We know that this was not our Lord's meaning; and perplexing as it was at the time to those who listened to its ambiguous language, we know also that it has been fulfilled to the very letter, and that those who listened to it in sorrow and dismay are now rejoicing, and will rejoice for evermore that their Lord and Master is once more rejoined to them, never to be separated again. It may be, and probably was the case, that our Lord did for a moment allude to His own resurrection, when for a brief period He would be restored to them; but that re-meeting, joyous as it was, was in no degree the renewal of the former intercourse that had existed between the Lord and His disciples: it was too desultory, if we may use that expression—too broken, and at such distant intervals, and altogether of a character far removed from the intimacy and condescending love of former days; and though no doubt it was tidings of great joy when it was announced and assured to them that the Lord was risen indeed, yet even then another, and, as regarded this world, a final departure was to take place at no distant day; and that departure, though repaid and abundantly recompensed by the sending of the promised

Comforter, was to be the precursor of so many sorrows and sufferings, and persecutions and death, that one can hardly apply the strong language which Jesus here employs to their joy at His resurrection alone, but to some fuller re-union, where neither sorrow, nor sighing, nor separation should break in upon their restored joy. And has not that re-union taken place? Have not the words of Jesus in this respect also been literally fulfilled? Are they not again with their risen Master, and all the travail of this world of sorrow and suffering no more remembered for the joy that was set before them, and which they are now possessing at God's right hand for evermore? Did not Stephen at his approaching martyrdom see the ascended Jesus in His glory waiting to welcome and receive him? that where He Himself was, there His martyred one should be also. Did not holy Paul, as the consummation of his martyrdom drew nigh, break forth into exclamations of joy and triumph at the approach of that period when he should be with Christ? which was far better than all this hollow world could give. How literally true, too, their Lord's assurances, "Your joy no man taketh from you." No one can pluck Christ's people out of His Father's hands: safe from the world's assaults and hatred, safe from the malice of him that would devour; and safe, for ever safe, in the bosom of eternal love. And is not the same hope set before us? We have not,

indeed, seen Jesus with our bodily eyes, as His disciples had; but there is an eye of faith that sees Him though invisible, and there is that which throbs in the heart of every child of God, and declares how precious He is, the chiefest among ten thousand, He in whom their soul delighteth, and whom, therefore, though not having seen, they love;—and though there is a brief period ere their joy be full—a period, it may be, of much sorrow and suffering, and therefore it may seem to linger—yet I would say with the prophet, “Though it tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not tarry.” The Lord’s promise to every child, however sorrowing, however apparently forsaken, is, “For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee, and with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.”

There is something sweetly touching in the image which the Saviour here uses to illustrate the present sorrow and future joy of His disciples, comparing it to the pangs of a mother in her travail, who yet rejoices with unutterable delight at the first glimpse of the given child. At His own birth *His* mother had but little of that outward solace which might have soothed her hour of sorrow; and whatever the hidden joy which thrilled through Mary’s heart as she folded that mysterious babe to her bosom, and with which no stranger could intermeddle, yet it must have been strangely

blended with saddened forebodings when it was announced to her respecting that child, "Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Yet, it is by mothers in their hours of anguish that Jesus here illustrates the joyous anticipations of His risen and redeemed people. The doom, indeed, of Paradise is not cancelled; but He who in that garden in his character of Judge said, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children," in His character of Saviour adds, "That as soon as her child is born, she shall remember no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world." The beauty and the truthfulness of the image rest, no doubt, on the undying love of a mother for her babe, and yet they may forget; yea, and have forgotten: but how immeasurably beyond a mother's love is that of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and who says even of mothers, and of Himself, "They may forget, yet will *I* not forget."

SECTION XCI.

(Chapter xvi. verse 23—28.)

THESE latter chapters of St. John's Gospel are so full of precious truth that we may say of them as our Lord said of Christian charity and Christian

gratitude, that they are full even to overflowing, "pressed down and running over." In these verses we have the most abundant encouragement to prayer; but Jesus seems for one moment to pursue the train of thought He had before begun, and, speaking as He had been of the glorious revelations of that day when they, too, should be once more re-united to their risen Master, He tells them that in that day of perfect knowledge and perfect fruition, they should have no need to ask Him any more questions, or be perplexed with any difficulties: then should they know even as they were known, then should they see face to face; then would be no night nor darkness there, and they would need none of those aids which had guided their groping steps on earth; they would feel none of those doubts which had so perplexed them even while with Him. Yet though it was but "a little while" till then, and as Jacob's time of service for Rachel seemed but a few days for the love he had to her, so the short period of the Christian's pilgrimage on earth, though lingering on to fourscore years and upwards, would seem but as a vapour that quickly passeth away and is gone, for the love that is borne to Jesus; yet there *is* a pilgrimage to every disciple, there *is* a wilderness to be traversed ere the rich pastures and sunny streams of Canaan are reached. To those, indeed, to whom Jesus was here speaking, that wilderness was to be in reality, and in its literal

trials, a far more painful one than that which their forefathers had traversed on their way from Egypt. There would be difficulties and perplexities, imprisonment and bonds, persecutions and tortures, which would need continual reference to heaven's best guidance, support and strength. The intercourse that should subsist between heaven and earth, the unremitted and unceasing intelligence that is, as it were, carried up to heaven of man's continued necessities, and the assurance of every needful supply that is as continually sent down to earth, is beautifully shadowed forth in the vision vouchsafed to Jacob at Bethel, where a ladder reached from heaven to earth, on which the angels of God were continually descending and ascending, as messengers of love and solace from God to man, and bearing back to God the sorrows, and cares, and sufferings of man ;—and yet how dimly shadowed even in that vision, the privileges of a Christian's prayer—even in that glorious type there was no heaven opened, as to the dying martyr's vision, and the Saviour seen at the right hand of God. In that dream, blessed as it was to the slumbering patriarch, angels were the active agents ; but though the Lord Himself vouchsafed a blessed assurance of His presence and protection, the Holy of Holies was not then opened to man's access, nor had he been then bidden to “ come boldly to the throne of grace, that he might find mercy, or grace to help in every time of need.” No doubt

the rapidity of prayer was signified ; its speedy transmission to the courts of heaven by those winged ministers, who delight to do His will ; but even that how incomplete, how imperfect, how inadequate to that flight, which, as the prayer is breathed from the heart of man, finds instant lodgment in the heart of God Himself. How different the scene here ; how magnified the privilege, how expanded the promise, how widely open the doors of heaven, and the ear and heart of God to the prayer and necessities of His people. Jesus commences His assurance with that solemn and reiterated declaration, " Verily, verily I say unto you ;" that by these two immutable words, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. " Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name." They had *asked* many things—they had, we might almost say, wearied Jesus with many strange questions—but they had never sought in prayer of God in the name of Jesus ; and indeed, how could they ? How could they plead an atonement which had not yet been made ?—a sacrifice which had not yet been offered and accepted ? You know, indeed, that every prayer is offered in the name, and through the merits and mediation of Christ ; you know that almost every prayer and collect in our own church service, as well as our more private forms of devotion, is closed with those impressive

words, "through Jesus Christ our Lord:" yet it is sad to think with what unimpassioned feeling, with what almost flippant volubility, with what merely rote-like currency, the words pass from our lips, as if they conveyed no article of faith, no doctrine of truth, no emphasis of love. We little realize the precious truth, that when we utter those simple words, "through Jesus Christ," in all their solemn truth and extended meaning, we are then fulfilling that gracious promise which Jesus here gives to His disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." It is this assurance which gives not only such sweetness, but such confidence to prayer; and as he would assuredly lose all the worth of prayer who omitted that only name which can gain access to the Father's heart, so he, too, would as certainly destroy all the comfort and sweetness of prayer who could utter that name with unhallowed lip, or a lukewarm heart. Do we imagine that our prayers can ever be accepted for their own worth or value? Alas! they are all, like our righteousnesses, in themselves nothing; and I would say, that his or her prayer is the most effectual which is very feebleness itself; which, timid and trembling in itself, and ready to cry out with the Prophet, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips," yet gathers courage as it takes up the name of Jesus, and "having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus by that new

and living way which He hath consecrated for us, draws near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

SECTION XCII.

(Chapter xvi. verse 29 to the end.)

THE feeling which the disciples here evinced at the discovery that their inmost thoughts were known to Jesus, is one which may at first sight cause astonishment; and yet I believe it to be one so natural to a child of God, that I would almost say it were the truest test of our adoption and sonship, that we can rejoice and bless God for that very attribute of Omniscience which is so alarming and full of consternation to one that is a sinner. I do not think that there is a living being, however near or dear to us—the friend, or even the wife of our bosom—to whom we could dare unreservedly to disclose every thought that arises in our hearts. We should shrink in dismay at the very supposition that every imagination of our hearts, every desire that arose, every passion that thrilled, every thought that intruded unbidden, was alike exposed bare and naked to the glance of any human eye. I do not believe that society could exist for a single day if there were a window in every man's breast through which we could

gaze at pleasure, and view all the workings of that complicated piece of mechanism, man's deceitful and deceiving heart ;—and yet, what we so justly shrink from as regards our fellow creatures, is literally true as applied to God. He does see, He does read—and more than that, He registers every thought of our heart. It is the language of our own Prayer Book that to Him all hearts are open, and from Him no secrets are hid : and what I mean to say is this, that I believe God's children love to have it so ; that with all their consciousness of their unnumbered shortcomings and misdoings in the sight of God, with the feeling of the Psalmist ever in their hearts, and his language continually on their lips, “ If Thou, Lord, shouldest be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who could abide it ? Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord.” Yet with all this they would not for ten thousand worlds divest the Almighty or His Christ of one jot or tittle of His Omniscience, or themselves of the comfort of the conviction that He knoweth all things. And why ? Because they know that He who inhabiteth eternity dwelleth also with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, and that amid all their deficiencies and failings, their spots and stains, the eye of the Omniscient can detect the faintest indication of His own grace ; that He can see, even amid the barrenness of the wilderness, the germ planted by His own Holy Spirit ; and

that He does not despise the day of small things, nor repulse the feeblest child, nor turn aside from the faintest whisper that goes up from a broken and a contrite heart. And yet in the present case, with what wisdom, with what tender caution is even this comforting conviction blended with the most solemn warning! Even on the mount, amid the glories of His transfiguration, His disciples spoke unadvisedly and hastily with their lips; and though in one sense, as here, it was a glorious truth they uttered, yet how needful the caution, how humiliating the reproof that the hour was already come in which every one of them, whose heart was on their lips, and who were avowing their full belief that He, whom they acknowledged as Master, came forth from God; yet, with this declaration on their lips, and this assurance in their hearts, that they would cowardly desert Him in the first moment of danger, and leave Him alone. Alas! and which of us does not need the same caution? The oldest, perhaps, can record, in sorrow and in shame, the most instances; the youngest, assuredly, may equally remember some, in which the love he bore to Jesus, the love he even avowed for Jesus, has for a season failed; and when among enemies, and unbelievers, and sceptic questioners, he has been ashamed to own Him fully as his Lord. The Garden of Gethsemane is not the only spot where even the followers of Jesus have left Him alone. It is a poor frail

reed of Egypt to feel confidence in anything of ourselves, in our gifts, our graces, our attainments, or even the manifestations of God's own love and blessing. The moment we rest in anything short of God Himself, the moment we feel complacency or detect the slightest lurking triumph in our hearts in any work of our own, that moment we have passed the confines of security, and entered on those of sin and danger.

It is a touching evidence which our Lord here gives us of His human nature and His human feelings, when He told those whom He so loved that they would desert Him. It was no doubt a bitter and sore trial to Him, as it would be to any of us, and as man, He felt it; but let us not forget that the support He had in that hour of sorrow is ours also, if we are His. I do not deny that in an especial manner Jesus might say, "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me," in a sense in which no created being could use the words without blasphemy, for, in His own words, "I and My Father are One;" yet, blessed be God, the truth and the comfort is as available to the poorest, and feeblest, and most sorely-smitten child, as to the Son of God, the incarnate God Himself. There are, no doubt, seasons in which we may do well enough without human sympathy or earthly props; there are times in which we may be even inclined to say of them, "Miserable comforters are ye all;" but there is

no time in which we can do without God : there are hours in which we would shut out human communion and fellowship, but it is that we may commune more closely with God, and have fellowship with the Father. "Never less alone than when alone" has had its blessed truth realized in many a lonely chamber ; aye, and in many a den and cave of the earth. It is recorded of Mahomet, that when reminded by Abubeker in the cave of Thor, that they were only two against a multitude, he replied, "There is a third with us, even God." It was a glorious vision when the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, the prophet's servant, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses, and chariots of fire round about Elisha ; and those were glorious words which that prophet uttered, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And yet all sink into insignificance before the simple and sublime truth of our Lord's words, "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

SECTION XCIII.

(Chapter xvii. verse 1—4.)

WE have many prayers of good and holy men left on record ; in fact, all the Lord's people are

especially a praying people: it is not only their privilege, but their characteristic; it is not merely an exercise to which they betake themselves for refreshment and revival, but it is the element in which they live, the atmosphere in which alone their souls can breathe freely;—and oh! what a volume of prayer will the last day unroll! Many a page so blotted with tears that no eye but God's could read it; many a one that has broken sobs, as well as gushing tears; many a one that was never heard by mortal ear, or suggested by earthly motive, but the teaching of God's own Holy Spirit, and recorded by Him at once, and laid up, as it were, in the archives of heaven's chancery till the great day of the revelation of all things. But I am speaking now of prayer that we find recorded in the Bible, and especially of that most wondrous portion of it, the privilege of intercessory prayer, when one pleads the cause of another, and spreads it before God. I can understand a sinner praying for himself, a sentenced criminal supplicating pardon and mercy for himself: there seems a fitness, a becomingness, in such an one lying low in the dust before an offended God for his own sin; but it does magnify beyond all measure the lovingkindness and the grace of God in permitting one sinner to plead for another, in suffering "dust and ashes to speak unto the Lord" in behalf of those as guilty as himself, and affixing an especial promise of their "much avail"

to such intercessory outpourings of the heart. There are many examples of such prayer in the word of God, and I think there is much significance in the fact that those who have been men of especial prayer for themselves, have mightily prevailed with God in their prayers for others also. But remember, they were living intercessors, and they prayed to the living God alone: they were like Elias, men "subject to like passions as we are;" and they well knew, for they daily felt, the trials and infirmities, and sorrows, and temptations that beset their fellow-pilgrims; and they knew, too, the privilege of going at once to the foot of God's throne and casting upon Him the burden of their care for themselves and others. There are, no doubt, instances in the Bible of unsuccessful intercessory prayer, as when Abraham pleaded for guilty Sodom, and his holy importunity was unavailing for that doomed city.

It is, however, in this 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel that we have the most astonishing instance of intercessory prayer upon record; and no wonder, for here is the great Intercessor Himself: it is Jesus praying, it is Jesus pouring out from His full heart the purposes of His love, the ends for which He lived and died, His eternal purpose for His people from everlasting to everlasting. We have many specimens of our Lord's prayer in the Gospels, but this is so immeasurably distinct from all, uttered under such circumstances, un-

veiling, as it were, the eternal counsels of Jehovah—those counsels which had been sealed in heaven before the worlds were, or guilty man had been created. It seems, if one may so speak, as if the holy Jesus, on this night of anguish, and before He finally yielded Himself as a Lamb to the slaughter, was recapitulating to His Father, and as it were reminding Him of the covenant into which He had entered, the terms of His purchase, and the ends for which He had consented to become the atonement for a world's sin. In the simplest language, in the plainest terms He gives utterance to the sublimest truths; and though we can never understand the full meaning of what the Lord prayed for His people on this night of sorrow, till we read it in the full light of heaven, and have all eternity before us wherein to decypher it, yet, as one reads it, one cannot help believing that its language was intentionally so simple and so easy, to shew that even the plainest words, the merest syllables of prayer are welcome at the throne of grace. I do not mean, of course, that our intercessory prayers are to be or can be framed according to this model of our Lord's prayer as to its purport, but I think we may learn a very significant lesson as to the language of our prayers. As one reads this chapter, one feels at once that it is the communing of One, who though man—"the Man"—was yet "Jehovah's fellow," companion

and equal. The hour was indeed come when Jehovah's sword was to awake, and be commissioned to go forth against His Shepherd in all its might: as Jesus Himself expressed it shortly afterwards, it was the hour in which bad men triumphed, and the power of darkness prevailed; yet how different the language here, how different the aspect in which heaven and earth looked at the same transaction. On earth it was shame, and reproach, and suffering, and death; the taunts and revilings of the many, the tears and sobbings of the few. In heaven, and in heaven's estimate it was glory—nay, the sufferer Himself, the Lamb appointed to be slain, the Victim set apart from everlasting, makes it His first petition that He may be glorified in the completion of the work He had undertaken, and the acceptance of the ransom He had provided; and that, too, in order that God Himself might be glorified, His name magnified, His law made honourable, His stainless justice and righteousness exalted, and His unutterable love and mercy held in eternal glory in those mansions, of which He was now about to throw widely open the everlasting doors, that all His chosen and redeemed ones might "enter in through the gates into the city." As Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, "This promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God

shall call." Jesus is still "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins," was the message to the Jew; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," the assurance to the Gentile; and so here the blessed Jesus, He who purchased with His own blood the title-deeds of our inheritance, declares that "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." It *is* life eternal—not merely the way and the path that leadeth to it, but it *is* even now, even here, in this life, ere death has broken down the barriers. I do not pretend to explain how in a perishing world eternal life is already conveyed to those that know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent; but, blessed be God, I know it is so, and can set my seal to that most precious truth for your comfort and mine through life's dreary pilgrimage, and when we come to lay our heads on a dying pillow, that "all things are your's—the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are your's, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." And Jesus here tells us the reason; He hath finished the work His Father gave Him to do,—He hath paid the debt to the uttermost farthing,—He hath blotted out the handwriting that is against us, and nailed it to His cross,—He hath finished transgression and sin, hath made reconciliation, and wrought out and brought

in an everlasting righteousness: in one word, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

SECTION XCIV.

(Chapter xvii. verse 5—8.)

IN the first verse of this chapter our Lord prayed, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son;" and He here uses the same words, "O, Father, glorify Thou Me;" but He makes that most important and essential addition, "Glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." In the first clause He prays for His Father to glorify Him on earth by sustaining Him through the fearful conflict of suffering, martyrdom, and death He was so soon to undergo. In the present verse, too, He prays that "He may be glorified; but no longer on earth, no longer amid the infirmities and sufferings of His mortal frame, and surrounded by frail and feeble followers, but in heaven, with the glory with which He was invested before time, and from all eternity. One cannot doubt, but one cannot describe nor conceive what that glory is. Some glimpses are given us of it in the book of Revelation, "When a throne was set in heaven,

and One sat on the throne, and there was a rainbow round about the throne, and about the throne were elders sitting clothed in white raiment, and with crowns of gold on their heads, who fell down before Him that sitteth on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever." Nor would I fail to impress on you the undoubted testimony which these words give to the eternal Godhead and pre-existence of the Son of God. There are those who deny it, and those who would explain it away, and fritter down the Deity of the Man-Jesus into a mere faultless mortal. It does seem to me that language could not be found to express more plainly or more distinctly the doctrine of the eternal Godhead, and existence from all eternity of the second person of the Holy Trinity, than the words here used by Jesus, and recorded by His Spirit: "The glory which I had with Thee," in Thy presence, in Thy mansions, in Thy heavens, "before the world was." Can grammar pervert, or etymology alter, or ingenuity evade the meaning of such a sentence as this? No, blessed Jesus, begotten of Thy Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, may this truth be our strong-hold in life, our staff and our comfort as we walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death! Yet when Jesus re-ascended into heaven it was in different form that He entered there from that in which He quitted it, and it was on a different throne that He took His

seat from that on which He had before been seated. It was in human form—it was as man, and in man's form that He re-entered heaven; and it was on His mediatorial throne that He sat Him down at the right hand of God, there to plead His finished work, there to point to the scars of His wounds, and claim man's deliverance and redemption as the fruit of His conflict. And this was a brighter glory than even the adoration of cherubim and seraphim: it was the mystery into which angels had desired to look from all eternity, and had not seen; it was the truth dimly shadowed out in Paradise, "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel;" and now heaven's courts were about to ring with that new song, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." I do not think we sufficiently bear in mind this distinction, or this character of the Saviour, which throws such peculiar light on so many portions of Scripture, which would otherwise be inexplicable; and especially as regards the present chapter, we must remember that this prayer is essentially the Mediator's prayer—it is in His character as Mediator that He addresses His Father; it is as Mediator that He claims the fulfilment of that Father's pledge and promise on the accomplishment of His own covenanted work;—and oh! what an idea does this passage give us of the

security of the Lord's people! Let us just mark the process and the progress. "Thine they were." There is the foundation on which they were built, the root from which they sprung, God's own electing and sovereign love and grace, chosen from all eternity, "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "Thou gavest them Me." There must be much significancy in this expression, for Jesus uses it no less than seven times in this prayer;—and oh! what a lesson does it teach us to refer all gifts to the Giver. If any could righteously plead his own work as a meritorious work, it was Jesus, and Jesus only—nay, He does plead it, He puts it forward as the prevailing cause, His own merits, His own atonement, the salvation He had wrought, the victory He had won; and yet "Thou, Father, gavest them Me," of Thine everlasting love, of Thy eternal choice and purpose, before the worlds were. Though the purchase of the Son, yet the gift of the Father. Oh! sweet union of will! Oh! unutterable fellowship of purpose! It is a blessed privilege, no less than a holy duty, in recounting mercies, in numbering up blessings, whether spiritual or temporal, as we add each one to the tale, to say, "Thou gavest it Me;" and as we look at the piled-up heap, at the overflowing measure which love has dealt out, to say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the praise and the glory ascribed." But let us go on

with the process: they were given of the Father to Jesus, and what was the work of Jesus in and for them? He manifested that Father's name unto them. "Lord, shew us the Father and it sufficeth us," was their petition. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," was the reply of Jesus. He gave to them the words which the Father had given Him, they received them, and believed that Jesus was the sent of God, He that should come. Oh, blessed links of holy truth and growth! given of God to Jesus, taught of Jesus, and rooted in faith! May every link be bound around our own hearts, may we be drawn with these bands of love, and united unto Jesus by the same true and living faith!

SECTION XCV.

(Chapter xvii. verse 9—16.)

THERE is something sweetly cheering in the feeling that the last social intercourse between Jesus and his disciples was prayer—prayer for their eternal interests, as well as guidance through the world, and protection from its evil—that the last accents of His lips, on which their memory could linger, were those of tenderness and love, and solicitude for their soul's good. And yet one may well ask in sorrow and in horror, are there

any for whom Jesus does not pray? any for whom He does not intercede? any whom He is unwilling to rescue by His strong crying and tears from the inevitable doom of their sin? I believe none—none for whom He does not pray—none for whom He does not intercede—none over whom His bowels of compassion are not yearning in as tender pity, as when He burst into tears over Jerusalem, and declared even of the inhabitants of that doomed city, that often and often would He have gathered them, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and they would not. Even for them He prayed, for them He interceded, even them He earnestly desired to gather into a place of safety and of refuge, and their own obduracy alone prevented His work of love. Even upon the cross too He prayed for those that hung Him there, “Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do,” was His cry even for His murderers. And yet our Lord here distinctly says, “I pray not for the world;” as if there were those in it, and of it, for whom He did not and would not pray. How are we to reconcile this declaration with the belief that the blessed Jesus prays for all, that none are out of the reach of his intercession, and that, as “He died for *all*,” and “gave Himself a ransom for *all*,” and would “have *all* men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth,” so is He “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” I believe we

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should be expressing the mind of the Lord in this passage, that at this moment, and in this portion of His prayer, He was praying more especially for his disciples, that, as the high priest bore upon his breast the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, so He was more peculiarly bearing upon His heart those of His followers, whom He was about to send forth as His commissioned ministers, into a world where they would meet with persecution, reproach, and shame, and would so much need the Father's everlasting guidance and support. I think thus much is intimated in the 20th verse, where Jesus says, "Neither pray I for these alone," as if till then His prayer had been chiefly for them and them alone, and He then proceeds to pray for others, but still, I acknowledge, for believers only, "them also which shall believe on Me through their word." And yet there is something not merely so awful and appalling, but, as it seems to me, so derogatory to the work of Christ, that any of the means of grace, the appliances of His own intercession, and the strivings of His own Holy Spirit should be withheld from any, so taking away from and diminishing that freeness and fulness of the Gospel offer, which would have all men to be saved, so wronging, I might say, that love of Christ which ever wept over those whom He longed to save, though they would not hearken to His call, and as, I think, so contrary to our Lord's own words, that I cannot assent to that

creed which would deny the Lord's prayers and intercession in behalf of any, even the impenitent and the finally lost. I think we may read this very plainly in the Lord's parable of the barren fig-tree. Sentence against that cumberer of the ground was passed—"Cut it down"—yet there is one that pleads for it, intercedes for it, prays for it, prevails for a time in its behalf, "Lord! let it alone this year also." Means of grace are promised, aids to promote its growth and fruit-bearing are engaged, "digging about it and dunging it," and yet with it all, the possibility that all would be in vain, the intercession useless, the labour of no avail, the sentence at length executed—"If it bear fruit, well; but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down"—prayed for, interceded for, and yet "cut down."

There is, no doubt, a time when the prayers even of the great Intercessor Himself shall cease to plead for us; there is a time when God's Spirit shall cease to strive with man. It was so here. Jesue makes mention of the unhappy one, the son of perdition, the lost one: yet can one doubt that even Judas had had the same privileges which had been vouchsafed to his fellow disciples, that he had shared in all their means of grace, had knelt with his Master and with them in prayer, and that for him in union with them the prayers of Jesus had gone up on high? I know the question that may here be asked, "Can the

prayer of Jesus ever fail? Can His intercession ever be of no avail?" I might answer, Jesus represents Himself as interceding for the barren fig-tree, and yet after all it would be cut down. He declares of Himself that often and often would His yearning love have gathered the sinners of Jerusalem, and they would not—nay, in one sense, we might almost say His own prayer for Himself availed not. "Let this cup pass from me," and it did not pass. And yet I think that prayer of Jesus seems to shew us the extent and the limits to which the Saviour would carry His intercession: "If it be possible"—if it be consistent with Thy will, Thy purpose, Thy glory, and Thy will is My will—"all Mine are Thine, and all Thine are Mine." "Of them that Thou gavest Me have I lost none: one, indeed, is lost, and even him would I have gathered, but he would not." Do I then limit the Holy One of Israel? Do I suggest a thought, or utter a word that may seem to curtail and diminish the omnipotence of the Son of God? God forbid! Never for a moment. As on earth He could do no mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief, so in heaven the Intercessor's work, the Saviour's prayer, is rendered of no avail in many and many an unbelieving and impenitent soul—not because it has no virtue, or diminished efficacy in itself, but because there is no faith in the guilty sinner to put forth his hand to lay hold on Jesus.

SECTION XCVI.

(Chapter xvii. verse 17—19.)

I BELIEVE there is a most important truth contained in these words which we shall do well to consider. Do not forget whose prayer this is, whose words they are, the expressions of whose feelings they are, from whose heart they are drawn, and for whom they were offered up. It was Jesus who was praying, their Lord and Master; His last dying legacy of love to those whom He was commissioning to preach His Gospel to the world—it was for them, and them alone that He has hitherto prayed: they were not yet to be taken out of that world which He Himself was leaving, but were for a season to remain in it, though not of it: their errand was to make known the Gospel of peace, the terms of reconciliation, to beat down the strong holds of Satan, and to come into fierce and unremitting conflict—not with flesh and blood only, but with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and with spiritual wickedness in high places; and for this high and holy purpose it was necessary that there should be set apart a body of men appointed and prepared for the work to which they were sent. Their warfare was not carnal, neither were their weapons such as the world would put into

the hands of its warriors. The world would act as Saul did to David—encase him in armour of proof, and look upon him as safe in that: but though Jesus here prays that these His chosen ministers may be especially set apart for the propagation of the truth, yet that is but a small portion of the blessing for which He prays. The Sabbath Day was “set apart,” but its chief characteristic was that it should be holy; and so these first and early followers of Jesus were not only to be set apart, but to be made holy—holy vessels—that the truths which proceeded from them might be, like pure water from the crystal stream, free from every impurity and sediment of error. Jesus had already declared that He was about to send—nay, that He was returning into heaven for the express purpose of sending to them the Spirit of Truth, who, when He should come, should guide them into all truth; and that Holy Spirit is the source, not only of all truth, but of all holiness also. But observe here the channel mentioned through which holiness is to come. The Fountain of course is the Spirit of God—the stream flows through the word of truth. I do not deny that holy truths and precious truths and “truths to make one wise” are to be found elsewhere—I trust they are holy truths I am now delivering to you: but why are they holy? Because they are fetched—not from the muddy, misty intellect of man, but from the word of truth itself; that word which holy men

of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. I would say with one of old, "One Augustine before a thousand fathers, and one Paul before a thousand Augustines."* And remember, also, another truth here shadowed out to us. Jesus was sending those for whom He was praying into a world of conflict and opposition; even as the Father had sent Him, so was He sending them; but as regarded Himself, there was, if I may so speak, nothing on which soil or stain could rest. "The prince of this world hath nothing in Me"—no vantage-ground, no spot of weakness, no root of human infirmity and passion. It was not so with the followers of Jesus: they were compassed with infirmity, and men of like passions with others; and yet they were to go forth to uproot error and to plant truth, they were to encounter fightings without and fears within, and holiness was the armour of proof with which they were to be girt about—it was the one defence for which Jesus here prays for them; and depend upon it, holiness is proof against every device and assault of Satan. It is like the rocky barrier of some island coast, against which the waves may beat in all their fury, but from which they invariably recoil, and are dispersed in their own broken foam and spray. We have indeed reason to bless God

* "Unus Augustinus præ mille patribus, et unus Paulus præ mille Augustinis."

that He so set apart and so sanctified these chosen vessels and depositaries of His holy truths, that not only their preaching, of which but little has come down to us, but their writings also are such a storehouse and treasury of Christian armour and defence. I do not wonder at Satan's fierce assaults upon this storehouse, his unabated enmity against the word of God—there he knows full well is that "sword of the Spirit" which has made him flee in times past, and when wielded by the Christian warrior will make him flee and howl again. He has often felt its sharp and resistless power—sharper than any two-edged sword of man's forge—and if by man's agency and suicidal folly he can blunt its edge and render it powerless in his hands, he may laugh to scorn every weapon from any other armoury: however bright and polished it may seem, it will shiver at the first encounter, and you will be left unprotected against your adversary's fierce assaults. Observe, however, the foundation on which all rests, both holiness and fitness for the work of Jesus; "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." Did Jesus, then, need deeper sanctification for Himself, as His poor feeble followers do for themselves? Oh, no! On Him rested "the Spirit of God without measure;" He was essentially and emphatically "the holy One," "Thou wilt not suffer Thine holy One to see corruption." But Jesus was more significantly

set apart as the holy Victim, the Lamb without blemish ; and for their sakes and ours did He thus of His own will, of His own love, sanctify and set apart Himself, that He might redeem us unto God, " a peculiar people," " a holy priesthood," that we, too, might offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God through Jesus Christ."

SECTION XCVII.

(Chapter xvii. verse 20—23.)

WE have hitherto had the prayer of Jesus almost exclusively for His disciples, for those in whose hearing and in whose presence He was praying. He had distinctly declared that He was praying for them alone, and not for the world ; but now He extends His intercession : His prayer expands beyond that upper chamber in which He was seated, beyond that hour of sorrow in which He and they were then involved. His omniscient glance goes forth beyond the boundaries of the present scene and the present hour into all space, and all time. There is something touching, most touching, in the conviction that in that season of deep heaviness and approaching conflict, the soul of the compassionate Redeemer was lifted up in prayer even for ourselves ; and for all, who in every age, from that generation, from that little

company of believers assembled in that upper room on that night of sorrow, down to the present moment and the present circle now met in this room in His name. And even when we are in our graves, and other circles and other households shall meet in the same name, and cemented by the same common ties of love to Him, even to the latest moment, for them was Jesus praying, when these words of tenderest compassion fell from His lips, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word." Am I believing in Jesus? Do you, my children, believe on Jesus? Are you, my brother and my sister, a believer in the same Name? Is He precious to us, though we see Him not? Is He in our hearts and affections the chiefest among ten thousand? Then we, too, have an interest in this prayer of love—nay, more, we cannot doubt that Jesus prayed for us individually there, as much as at this moment, He is bearing our names upon His heart, and presenting them in earnest intercession before His Father's throne. It is true we were yet unborn; and those whose future names were still dear to Jesus, are not born even now; but it is no new truth, holy men of old rejoiced in it as well as spake of it, for David proclaimed it nearly four thousand years ago, "Thine eyes did see my substance yet being imperfect, and in Thy book were all my members written, when as yet there

was none of them." I would not, however, now speak so much of the Omniscience of the Lord Jesus—it is wonderful and past finding out; but what most touches me, and what I would most impress on your minds, as well as my own, is that love of Jesus, which at such a moment, and amid such circumstances, could pass over the agony of the garden, and the shame of the cross; could forget, too, as it were, the triumphs of His resurrection, and the glories of His return to that abode which He had with the Father before the world was, and look forward through all time to those endeared ones of His flock who should in every age believe on Him, and be gathered in succession into His fold! And for what did Jesus pray? That we all might be one—not only one in and among one another, but one in the common bond of union with the Father and Himself. I think we too often lose sight of this prayer. I am sure we do in the results, or there would not be so much of separation, of dissension, of jealousy, of bitterness, of angry passion, of unkind insinuation, and uncharitable imputation among the many and widely-scattered members even of the Lord's family. I think we are in many a case aiming at an unity which the Lord never intended, and in our mistaken zeal endeavouring to substitute uniformity for that oneness of heart and motive, that one foundation and basis on which all Christian love should rest; and

thus, in seeking the shadow, not only lose the substance, but introduce in its stead a hurtful and unbrotherly suspicion one of another. To attempt uniformity is not simply injudicious or absurd, it is not merely impracticable and physically impossible, but it is distinctly controverting, and attempting to set aside and alter all God's dealings in the natural, the moral, and the spiritual world. As well might the cruel tyrant of old insist that all his subjects should be of the same stature; as well might the gardener be disappointed that the lily has not the same hue as the rose; or the astronomer assert that one star differeth not from another star in glory: we might as well expect the physiologist to tell us that God hath made of the same complexion all the races of the earth, and that of those races all are alike in feature as in tint, and not only alike in feature, but alike in disposition and in moral qualities. Take even the smallest segment of the human family—one household—is it not true that amid the general resemblance there is still variety of every kind? but there is also that love, one to another, arising from that common bond of unity which is centred in their love of father and of mother. I do not separate from my brother, or love him less, because he has different hair or different features from mine, or because his predilections lead to one pursuit, and mine to another; but I love him because he is my brother, and because, however we may differ in this thing

and in that, we unite in all obedience and love, in all unity of purpose, in all devotion of heart and soul to the father that begat us, and the mother that bare us. It should be the same with the Lord's family: it is the very prayer of Jesus that "they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." It is the declaration of the apostle that "of Him the whole family in heaven and earth is named," and when he would urge upon us to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," it is by reminding us that "there is one body, and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, even though to the different members, "to every one of us be given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." I could wish, indeed, to say to all my brothers and sisters in Christ, however we may differ on points, on which Christian love cannot afford to quarrel, "Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?" "As Christ hath loved you, so ought ye also to love one another." Then indeed will the unbelieving world believe, then will the scoffer cease to reproach us, then will the caviller desist from questioning the heaven-sent origin of our mission, "and whereas they now speak against us as evil doers, they may by our good works (of love, and peace, and unity) which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

SECTION XCVIII.

(Chapter xvii. verse 24 to the end.)

It is a very remarkable expression which is here adopted in our version of the Bible, "Father, I will." I am not indeed prepared to say that, without any doubt, it means something far higher and more emphatic than the mere wish or desire, because the word in the original may mean, and often does signify no more than the simple wish; but this I think we may say without mistake, that the translators of our Bible evidently imagined it to signify something more, and endeavoured to express that something by the more striking words, "I will." If we look at the expression in connexion with what follows, we can be under no doubt that whether it simply signify an earnest and importunate desire, or whether it give utterance to the Saviour's own sovereign will, as "having power over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as the Father gave unto Him,"—be it the one or the other, the wish has been heard and answered, the will has been registered and accomplished, and of all whom the Father gives unto Jesus not one shall be lost; all "shall be with Him where He is," all shall "behold His glory," and "not one can pluck them out of His or His Father's hands." Jesus had before used the same words, "I will; be

thou clean ;” and as He uttered them, authority and power went along with them to accomplish that whereunto they were sent, and His word on that occasion did not return unto Him void. But one could not say this of every mere general wish even of Jesus, however earnest, however fervent. God, we know, willeth not the death of a sinner ; He has no pleasure in the death of such an one : He would have all men to be saved, and yet, alas ! many a sinner perishes everlastingly. Jesus wished over and over again to gather the sinners of Jerusalem under the shadow and shelter of His wings, and they would not ; and yet, blessed be the word, it is true, without a shadow of doubt to rest upon it, that all whom the Father has, in times past, present, or to come, given unto the Son shall be for ever with Him where He is, and in those blessed abodes of heaven, in those everlasting mansions of His Father’s house, shall behold His glory,—that glory which His Father in His love gave Him before the foundation of the world.

There is something most instructive, as I have before suggested, in those oft-repeated words, “Thou gavest them Me,” and I would most earnestly and emphatically imprint the lesson on you, which Jesus here indirectly teaches, to rest in nothing short of God ; assuredly in no created object, to stop at no lower, no inferior point, nay, I would say, not even in Jesus, not even in the Son of God Himself, but through Jesus up to God

the Father. It was the love, wherewith the Father loved Him, which He desired should be in them ; it was love, the eternal love of God, which should cement the union between Christ and His believing people. The world indeed knoweth not God, neither indeed can know Him ; in fact, it desires not the knowledge of Him ; it would say, like Israel of old, " We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse ; every man to his tents, O Israel." It was so especially with Jesus ; " He came unto His own, and His own received Him not ;" " they would not come unto Him that they might have eternal life ;" and here at the close He equally declares, " the world hath not known Me." And does it know Him a bit more at the present time ? though it be true, in a Christian land Jesus is preached in our churches, as in a Jewish land Moses was read in their synagogues, every Sabbath-day, the veil is still on their hearts and eyes, " having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness their heart." Oh ! that I might add of you in the words of the same apostle, " But ye have not so learned Christ !" Do you desire to have eternal life ? then, this is life eternal, to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. Do you desire an interest in this prayer of Christ, that you, too, when you depart hence, may be with Him where He is, and behold

His glory? Then be one of His now; be His in time, and He will be yours through eternity.

We have now gone through, though very imperfectly and inadequately, this most touching and expressive prayer of the Lord Jesus. If, as we have dwelt upon it, we have found our hearts more drawn out in love to Him; if, as we have read or listened to its simple words, but solemn truths, we have been conscious to ourselves of a more earnest desire after His image, and to have more of the same mind which was in Jesus, then may we hope that the petitions which He here offers up for those that should hereafter believe on Him, have been in part already answered, and will be fully perfected in "that far-off land, where we shall behold the King in His beauty," and see Jesus face to face. Do not forget that the last words of Jesus for those He loved were, that the love of God might be in them. It would seem, indeed, that, as regarded the evangelist himself, who records this prayer, it was especially and abundantly realized: and it must have been with most touching memory of His Lord's prayer that in after years he wrote in his epistle, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

SECTION XCIX.

(Chapter xviii. verse 1—11.)

Matt. xxvi. 36—46. Mark xiv. 32—42. Luke xxii. 40—46.

JESUS had no sooner ended the prayer contained in the preceding chapter, than He set forth accompanied by His disciples into the dark and gloomy valley through which the brook Kedron or Kidron ran. About three thousand years before this eventful night, that same brook had witnessed another party crossing its waters in sorrow and dismay : it was David, when he fled from his son Absalom. There was sorrow in his heart, as well as in his countenance, for he wept as he passed over the brook, while those who were with him lifted up their voices also and wept aloud. He, too, was driven from Jerusalem by the unnatural act of his own child, and his own subjects, in rebellion against him ; and amongst those whom he most loved and trusted was the traitor Ahitophel. It was a far sadder scene when on this night of sorrow the Son of David with His disciples crossed that brook of darkness, persecuted and driven forth by those unnatural and rebellious subjects, who would not have Him to reign over them, those disobedient children, whom yet He came to save. Among the ranks of His friends also was a fouler traitor than Ahitophel, for Ahitophel

might have pleaded wrong for his disloyalty,* and Judas could only tell of lovingkindness and tender mercy; yet to the outward eye there were no tokens of the sorrow that filled their hearts till He entered the garden; Jesus gave no sign and uttered no word that could indicate the approaching agony. He appears to go forth to His wonted haunt with the same composure and calmness as on former evenings, as if the coming night was to witness only His usual meditations and communings with His Father in heaven. Nay, of that agony in its intensest phase, no human eye was witness: the evangelist, whose Gospel we are reading, might indeed have witnessed it—he might have seen that sweat of blood, he might have heard that thrice-repeated prayer; as he had been chosen to be one of those on the mount of transfiguration, there to behold His glory, so here was he selected to be a witness of that humiliation to which the Lord of Glory should descend; and yet in both instances sleep overtook him, alike in his Master's moments of exaltation as in those of His sorrow. We may well wish to be unclothed of the body, we may well “groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, the redemption of our body,” “willing rather to be absent from the body,” seeing it is such a clog and hindrance to us.

* Ahitophel, it would seem, was the grandfather of Bathsheba. Compare 2 Samuel, xi. 3. and 2 Samuel, xxiii. 34.

John, however, records neither event ; neither the scene on the mount, nor the agony in the garden ; and yet with what sublime simplicity does he and he alone, detail the wondrous manifestation of the Godhead and Divinity, which this Man of Sorrows on this night of anguish revealed to the paralysed and awe-struck band of soldiers, with their traitor-leader as their guide. We read that here was a band of men and officers with lanterns and torches, and weapons, coming forth, as one would imagine from their preparations, on some service of peril. One would have supposed that those magistrates and chief men who had commanded this body of men to go out, were aware of some approaching insurrection and outrage, and were desirous to crush it in the bud by the apprehension of its leader. Yet what was the actual scene that presented itself to their sight as they entered that garden ? In what guise was this dreaded leader found, and who were His associates in His enterprise ? They saw only a sorrow-stricken man, on whose features were no doubt still impressed the lines of that agony of which He had just borne the conflict, and on whose cheeks, perhaps, were still the traces of those tears, which in His strong crying we are told He shed ; with three timid trembling followers just awakened from sleep, and hardly able to comprehend at first the meaning and the purpose for which this band of men was coming. On the part, too, of Jesus

there was no resistance, no apparent opposition: He had not called down legions of angels from His Father's throne to fight for Him; even when He aroused His slumbering followers, it was not to summon them to His aid or rescue, but simply to announce that he who betrayed Him was at hand, and that they should go forth to meet him and anticipate his purpose. And yet how entirely was it of His own free will that He surrendered, without stipulation except for the safety of those that followed Him! To shew that He was not forced, no compelled, no unwilling victim—that, single and unaided, as easily as with twelve legions of angels, He could have repelled every effort, He at once advances, and with calm composure demands, "Whom seek ye?" And it is then that to their reply that they sought Jesus of Nazareth, He utters the apparently simple words, "I AM HE;" yet what mighty agency accompanied that great I AM! It was the name by which the God of their fathers had revealed Himself unto Moses, "I AM hath sent me unto you." It was the name for the assumption of which the Jews had sought to stone Jesus for blasphemy, when He said, "Before Abraham was, I AM;" and so here, when Jesus uttered that holy name of Godhead, "I AM HE," instant power and virtue went forth with them—power as mighty and resistless as when a persecutor afterwards was smitten to the ground, and a voice called to him

out of heaven, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"—so true the word which Jesus spake, "No man taketh my life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

SECTION C.

(Chapter xviii. verse 12—27).

Matt. xxvi. 57—75. Mark xiv. 53—72. Luke xxii. 54—65.

As Jesus made no effort to defend Himself against those who came to apprehend Him, and rebuked the solitary effort that was made by others, so He made none to escape; but as they arose from their fall, the same calm and undisturbed question still meets them, "Whom seek ye?" One would have thought that in very shame and compunction, if not in generous and grateful pity, they would have treated their acquiescing prisoner with somewhat of honourable and manly forbearance; but no—the very first act we here read of is "They took Jesus and bound Him"—the unresisting as the uncomplaining victim. Oh, blessed Jesus! and were Thy sacred hands and arms bound and manacled as those of a malefactor for our sakes, that we might be delivered from the chain of our sins? and do we still hug and delight in those very

sins which exposed Thee on this night of sorrow and of anguish to such shame and outrage ! It has been said that there is but a step between the dungeon and the death of a deposed monarch ; and malice assuredly loses no time in wreaking its vengeance, even on an unresisting victim. From the garden to the house of Annas, from Annas to Caiaphas, from Caiaphas to the Sanhedrim, and from the Sanhedrim to Pilate's hall of judgment—and we may add, from Pilate to Herod, and from Herod back again to Pilate—each and all, fearful to incur the guilt themselves, and ready to shift it on another, and yet not one having the courage to release Him and let Him go free !

It is perhaps of no great moment to inquire who that disciple was, who so unwisely, though unwittingly, procured admission for Peter into the High Priest's Hall, though the usual explanation, that it was John himself the writer of this Gospel, must involve so many difficulties and contradictions, that I think we may at once dismiss his name. Were we to admit it, it would imply, that though Peter was unknown to the high priest—as indeed one could hardly imagine otherwise—yet that John, his partner and companion in their lowly trade, was well known and had free access to him. And again—though Peter's dialect as a Galilean was a ground of suspicion and charge against him, yet John's equally provincial mode of speech excited no remark, and gave rise to no

insinuation. I am inclined, therefore, to suppose that it was more probably Joseph, or Nicodemus, or some one of those many secret and unavowed adherents and disciples of the Lord, and who, as inhabitants of Jerusalem, might very naturally be supposed to have sufficient acquaintance with the high priest to procure admission for Peter.* It is, however, as I have said, of little moment; it is far more striking to notice how the enemy of souls is ever at hand to remove those providential hindrances and barriers which the Lord in mercy and in warning so continually sets up in the sinner's path; "hedging up," as the prophet expresses it, "his way with thorns." Peter had been mercifully warned, but in his self-sufficiency rejected the caution as needless: "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I never deny Thee." Peter, too, had been counselled to betake himself to prayer as his best safeguard, but he had indolently slumbered away the hour of prayer; and yet even now the mercy of the Lord does not forsake him: one more barrier is raised up, the door of the high priest's hall is closed against him, and had he but at that moment recalled the warning and the counsel of his Lord, Peter might have retraced his steps, and not have fallen. But Satan had desired to have him, and would not let go the hold he

* Unum ex discipulis aliis, non aliquem ex duodecim; sed alium quemdam Hierosolymitanum, non æque manifestum fautorem Jesu.

had ; and provides an acquaintance who unwittingly opens the door and brings the victim to the very scene of his trial and his fall. John, indeed, with the rest of the evangelists, records his fellow disciples' denial ; but he adds one circumstance, which though it cannot extenuate, may in some degree account for the otherwise almost unaccountable panic and cowardice of Peter ; and it is that among those who charged him with the fact of being a follower of Jesus was one who had been present at the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, and was, moreover, a relative of the man whom Peter, in his mistaken zeal, had wounded, and who actually charges him with the fact from his own eyesight, " Did not I see thee in the garden with Him ?" And here I would just say, that I think we have in this fact another proof that John was not the disciple who had introduced Peter ; for John as well as Peter was present in the garden, and must have been almost as much an object of observation as his companion. I do not, however, mention this as any palliation of Peter's sin, nor does the evangelist make any such use of the fact, which he records. I simply allude to it as a fearful evidence, not only of the weakness and unwatchfulness of our own poor hearts, but of the strength and watchfulness of him who desires to have us as much as he desired to have Peter : how he paved as it were with stepping stones every step of his progress, not only preparing his heart by

filling it with pride and self-sufficiency, and, it may be, inclining it for slumber rather than for prayer; but how he broke down for him the barrier that would hinder his entrance into the high priest's hall, and provides at the very moment the witness whose evidence could most tell against the timid man. With a foe so unremitting, so subtle, so ready, so prepared with every device, what need of watchfulness, what need of prayer—nay, what need of that Saviour's prayer, who thus, in the very moment of his imagined triumph, arrested his outstretched arm, and delivered him that had no keeper. Well might the restored disciple have taken to himself the Psalmist's song of thanksgiving, "Blessed be the Lord who hath not given me over as a prey unto his teeth. My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken, and I am escaped."

SECTION CI.

(Chapter xviii. verse 28—32).

Matt. xxvii. 1—14. Mark xv. 1—5. Luke xxii. 66—71; xxiii. 1—12

THERE are many particulars recorded of this bandying of our blessed Lord by His accusers from one judge to another, from one court to another, which in themselves might be considered

trivial, and rather to indicate the malice of the parties than any difficulty in the case. But they are in reality most confirmatory of the truth, and most convincing, that the hand of God was all the while overruling and ordering all things, even the bad passions of these bad men, for His own predicted purposes, that, in the Psalmist's words, these wicked men were only God's "sword" to execute His own righteous will.

Whether the Jews really had not the power to put any one to death, may perhaps be doubted; for, assuredly, not long afterwards, this very council put Stephen to death, and apparently by a judicial sentence, and according to the very letter of their law. But the Sanhedrim were well aware of the hold that Jesus had on the affections of the people, and might well be unwilling to incur the odium and reproach of putting such a benefactor to death: and, perhaps too, at such a solemn festival as the passover, they who were so scrupulous as not to enter Pilate's hall, lest the very touch of a Gentile, or some memorials of Pagan idolatry and worship should defile them, might shrink from the pollution of putting even a criminal to death at such a season. But, be this as it may, and whatever may have been their motives, Jesus is once more transferred in His bonds to the judgment-hall of Pilate, the Roman governor. It was sad hypocrisy, when men whose hearts were so charged with vindictive feeling, and who gave such

utterance to their ferocious exultation, when their hellish purpose was accomplished, could yet assume a semblance of humanity, and an unwillingness to shed blood, and shrink from such imaginary defilement as mingling in a heathen court of justice. It reminds one of that bloodiest of all tyrants who ever stained the Cæsar's throne: and, yet, when a sentence of death was presented for his signature, feigning a wish that he had never learned to write! It reminds one of our own sad annals in those cruel times of persecution, when holy martyrs were consigned to the stake with such relentless hatred; and, yet, to avoid the charge of blood on her own head, the Romish Church herself passed no sentence of death on those she condemned for heresy, but in every sentence consigned her victim to the civil power to be dealt with as the law provided.* And so here this Jewish priesthood

* Vide the examination of Ridley before the commissioners.

Bishop of Lincoln.—"Enforce not us to do all that we may do, which is not only to publish you to be none of us, to cut you off from the Church; for we do not, nor cannot condemn you to die, (as most untruly hath been reported of us,) but that is the temporal judge's office. We only declare you to be none of the Church; and then must you, according to the tenor of them, and pleasure of the rulers, abide their determination: so that we, after that we have given you up to the temporal rulers, have no further to do with you."

Ridley.—"Your Lordship pretendeth great gentleness; but this gentleness is the same that Christ had of the high priest. For you, as your Lordship saith, have no power to condemn me, neither at any time to put a man to death: so, in like sort, the high priests

provide a difficulty in order to evade the odium of their own act, and cast it on another's head. And, yet, when Pilate, in courteous concession to their scruples, went out to them from his own judgment-hall to demand the reasons of their thus bringing before him a prisoner in bonds, and the charge they had against Him, they seem to have imagined that their own unsupported declaration was sufficient to secure His condemnation. One can hardly imagine that Pilate could have been altogether unacquainted with the name and character of Jesus: he had no doubt heard of Him, had probably made Him a subject of remark and conversation in his own family, and might himself have thought and felt, as well as his wife, that He was a "just man," one whose errand was to do good rather than cause strife, and might therefore of his own accord be predisposed to "have nothing to do with Him." When therefore he perceived the question to be on points mainly connected with their own religion, he was no doubt glad to

said, that it was not lawful for them to put any man to death, but committed Christ to Pilate, neither would suffer him to absolve Christ, although he sought all the means therefore that he might."

Then spake Dr. Weston, one of the audience.

Weston.—"What! do you make the king Pilate?"

Ridley.—"No, master doctor; I do but compare your deeds with Caiaphas's deeds and the high priests, which would condemn no man to death, as ye will not, and yet would not suffer Pilate to absolve and deliver Christ."—*Foxe's Acts and Monuments*, vol. vii., p. 524, 426. Seeley's edit.

avail himself of the pretext to retransfer the matter to their own national council. But had this been done, God's word would have been unfulfilled, it would have returned unto Him void; and Jesus Himself had said that "till heaven and earth had passed, not one jot nor tittle of His law should in any wise pass away, till all was fulfilled." I would have you bear this always in mind, the impossibility of putting God's word on one side; hath He said, and shall He not do it? hath He purposed, and who shall disannul it? You may deny God's word, but you cannot alter it; you may evade, but you cannot annul it; you may blot out its precepts from your own consciences, but you cannot blot out one word from its pages: man may burn in the flames, and trample in the dust, the human copy, but its imperishable record still remains. The very quarrels of opponents and of angry disputants have only more indelibly stamped its holy truths; the puny efforts of the haters of the Lord and His word to overthrow it, have only more firmly fixed its roots; and while kings and rulers are setting themselves, while Pilate and priest are taking council together, against the Lord and against His anointed, He that sitteth in the heaven, has them in derision, and says of His own purpose and His own will, "My counsel, it shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure."

SECTION CII.

(Chapter xviii. verse 33 to the end.)

Matt. xxvii. 15—26. Mark xv. 6—15. Luke xxiii. 13—25.

IT is a most important question which Pilate here puts to Jesus, "What is truth." Little did Pilate know that He to whom he addressed it had said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" and that when the Spirit of truth should come, whom He would send, He would guide into all truth. Pilate little knew, perhaps little heeded these things: it is impossible to tell the motive by which he was influenced when he asked this question. It was, no doubt, at the moment, suggested by the words of Jesus Himself: but what was the real feeling in Pilate's heart, I presume not to say: I would not, in charity, wrong him; I dare not, in truth, impute to him a higher motive than that which really prompted the question. Some of you may perhaps remember the comment of the poet Cowper on this passage.

"What is truth? 'Twas Pilate's question put
To Truth itself, that deigned him no reply;
And wherefore? Will not God impart His light
To them that ask it? Freely! 'tis His joy,
His glory, and His nature to impart:
But to the proud, uncandid, insincere,
And negligent enquirer, not a spark."

It is true that Pilate does not wait for an answer; but can we say that it was from indifference to

that answer? He knew not indeed, he never dreamed of the deep, and solemn, and holy import of his own question: he had asked it, it would seem, in reference chiefly to the charge against Jesus, and His innocence of that charge; and convinced in his own mind of its falsity, and the malice of them that urged it, he hastens forth to tell His awaiting persecutors that he found no fault in Him. I would say therefore that Cowper's comment, though beautifully expressed, and true as a general proposition, is hardly applicable to Pilate himself. I cannot think that he was "proud," or "uncandid," or "insincere" in his enquiry, whatever might be the amount of "negligence" in not waiting the reply. Still further remote from truth would I consider the remark of another, in one sense a greater man than Cowper. "'What is truth?' said *jesting* Pilate, and stayed not for the answer," is the comment of Lord Bacon on the question. There was assuredly no *jesting* in Pilate's heart, no mockery on his lips: cowardice, injustice, heedlessness of wrong, base truckling to popular opinion, an unseemly struggle between his conscience and what he deemed his interest; all these there might be, and there were, but no *jesting*. The judge indeed sought to know what was in his prisoner's heart, but that judge's heart was all the while naked and open to the eyes of the very prisoner whom he was interrogating.

But whatever might be Pilate's motive, his question was still a most solemn one, whether as it referred to Jesus or as it regards ourselves. What is truth? "I am the truth," saith the Lord, and "this is life eternal to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent:" or as this same evangelist in his first epistle more largely writes, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." "He that hath the Son, hath life," for he hath truth, "no man can come unto the Father but by Him." But there are many, I fear, who may in a sense be said to seek to know the truth, as Pilate did, and yet do not find it: many too of whom the apostle speaks "given over to strong delusions to believe a lie," as there are, blessed be God, "those also beloved of the Lord whom the Lord hath from the beginning chosen to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth." It is true, as Bacon says, Pilate stayed not for the answer; but I do not know that our Lord deigned no reply, as Cowper intimates: none was given, for none was waited for; and many a one has the question on his lips, who in his heart would shrink from the reply; many a one turns over the pages of eternal truth, yet gathers no truth from them; many a one hears and listens to solemn

truths, as if they were worthless dross. Such an one, to use a Scripture metaphor, is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." I do not however know a more valuable safeguard to hang, as it were, about our neck in every stage and step of our journey, in the heat of battle, or even in the lull of conflict—if there be such a moment in our warfare,—in childhood or youth, in middle life or in old age, than this question of Pilate. Many an error will come in the guise of truth; many an enticement will come in the attire of a friend; many a proposition in the shape of one who wishes you well; many a falsehood will meet you in the very words of truth, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good;" nay, Satan himself, who is the enemy of all truth and the father of lies, will assume the form of an angel of light to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. But let "What is truth?" be the continual question of your lips; and "Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation," be the unceasing prayer of your heart.

SECTION CIII.

(Chapter xix. verse 1—18.)

Matt. xxvii. 15—26. Mark. xv. 6—15. Luke xxiii. 13—25.

I MUST recur once more to Pilate: there is so much in his character that is valuable to ourselves by way of warning. I do not mean that you or I shall ever sit on the judgment seat, and have the Saviour of the world arraigned before us, or even one of His followers, though that has often happened, and he that woundeth them woundeth Him, and that, too, in the tenderest part, he that condemneth them, condemneth Him. But you and I may have to decide between Jesus and Barrabas, between the Saviour who claims our allegiance, and the sin that would draw us from Him: even you and I may be drawn aside to act contrary to the dictates of our conscience and our avowed knowledge of what is right, and may be tempted by a weak and vacillating temper to yield to the suggestions or the clamorous appeals of others what we feel in our hearts to be wrong. Pilate is not the only one of whom the poet could say that "He knew the right, and yet the wrong pursued." In this Gospel, it is true, Pilate is represented under a far more favourable aspect than in the preceding ones; and the thought may perhaps have crossed our minds that he was

not so guilty in this transaction as we once imagined him to be. He was a heathen, and could not be supposed to know what he would call the intricacies and perplexities of the Jewish law. The appointed authorities of the nation, those in the highest power and station, as well as the best versed in their own creed, had brought Jesus before his tribunal as one who by their own law had incurred the sentence of death, as guilty of blasphemy; and had Pilate yielded to their demand at once, had he taken it for granted that the charge was a just one, and that, preferred as it was by the chief priests and elders, and backed by the power of the high priest himself, Jesus was guilty of death, and accordingly had left Him in their hands to deal with Him as they pleased, Pilate would have been comparatively innocent: the blood of that just man would not have so fearfully rested on his conscience; he would have been a misled and a misguided man, and so far unjust in yielding to the outcry without first ascertaining its justice or injustice; but it could not have been said that he was guilty of condemning to torture and to death one whom he knew and had pronounced free from all fault. But Jesus was to die, not for the Jews only, but for the whole world—for the Gentile world as well as the Jewish nation; and therefore both Jews and Gentiles were to be alike accessory in shedding that blood, without which there could be

no remission of sin. It was, therefore, by the providence and determinate counsel of God, so overruled, that the very first charge made by the chief priests against Jesus was a political offence against the Roman government, forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, and claiming Himself to be their king. It was in the investigation of this charge that Pilate convinced himself of the perfect innocence of his prisoner, and the malice of His accusers, and made the many efforts which He did to deliver Him. I deny not,—I would not depreciate those efforts—I would not too minutely question the motives which prompted them: probably Pilate himself could not have explained all that was passing in his mind. Humanity might have been there, but so feeble a spark that it never kindled. Justice might have been there, but so weak that the very first outcry crushed it. Superstition, no doubt, was there—awe, even of his unresisting prisoner, and a fear and base truckling to the clamour of the very multitude he despised. Had Pilate, when he brought forth Jesus thus bruised and bleeding by his own orders, applied to his own conscience the words he addressed to the people, his conscience might have urged him even to a more vigorous effort; but the very exhibition of his prisoner in such a guise shews the hardening nature of an irreligious spirit. It was his own act, and by his own sentence, and by the hands of his own officers, that Jesus had been scourged; it

was his own soldiers who had, in mock homage, plaited the crown of thorns and placed it on his brow; and Pilate now, in this very act of producing Jesus, sanctions the inhumanity. Yet it was to the humanity of the Jews alone he made appeal: himself looked on as callous and unmoved—nay, perhaps more so than many of those to whom he spoke. I do not deny that Judas had greater sin in betraying his Master; I do not deny that the Jewish Sanhedrim had great sin in delivering Jesus into Pilate's hands—far greater, no doubt, than even that of the Roman governor, for so our Lord Himself says, "He that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." But was Pilate himself therefore free from sin? Far from it—and he *knew* that he was guilty. He knew it from the first, when he did not indignantly drive the accusers from his tribunal—he knew it still more fearfully when he avowed the innocence of Jesus, and yet dared not dismiss Him—he knew it when he thus exposed his bleeding victim to the multitude, in the foolish hope to excite a pity which he felt not himself—he knew it still more acutely when he washed his hands, and declared himself innocent of that righteous blood; and still more agonizingly did he know it, when, like the betrayer of Jesus, His destroyer also sought with his own suicidal hands to put an end to his remorse!

It has been often said that the hardest word

in our language to pronounce is that simple monosyllable, "No"—especially in youth. There is so much of what the world in its leniency calls "amiable weakness," a desire to give pleasure to others even though at the sacrifice of much that is valuable, an inability to resist the solicitations of those with whom youth comes in contact, even though compliance may entail loss of peace, of character, and situation; and especially when the seductions of others are so powerfully enforced by the corrupt suggestions of their own natural hearts. I know no effectual safeguard, but a strong abiding religious principle guiding and animating in every circumstance of trial and temptation. I would not have you rely on any lower principle, however strong it may seem, for it will not stand against a sufficient pressure from without: every human barrier has been in its turn assailed and carried, nay, even the natural fences which God in His mercy and providence has set up, have given way; and nothing but that strong religious principle which strengthened Joseph in his hour of trial, can effectually secure you against guilty and ruinous compliances. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Trust in that, and trust in nothing else.

SECTION CIV.

(Chapter xix. verse 19—24.)

PILATE soon found, as everybody before him had, and every one after him will find, that a guilty compliance with a guilty demand can never satisfy either party. Both he that exacts, and he that yields, are alike dissatisfied with each other, and with themselves; and a compact extorted by clamour on the one side, and yielded in weakness on the other, leads only to mutual recrimination, and wider separation; and it is no insignificant lesson which history has left on record, that it was by the complaints and remonstrances of this very people whom he so basely sought to please, that Pilate was dismissed from his government, disgraced by his master, driven into exile, and eventually into suicide. I do not say that guilty compliance will always and inevitably lead to such widely fatal results; but I do say that no one can attempt to compromise between duty and sin, between God and mammon; no one can listen to an unworthy suggestion, or hold a moment's parley with temptation, from whatever quarter, or of whatever nature it may be, or lend even an unwilling ear to the world's taunt and the world's insinuation, without finding that he has attempted an impossibility, and bartered substance for a sha-

dow, and a heart at peace with itself and with God for an unquiet conscience and a gnawing remorse.

We read that Pilate here soon found that his guilty compliance with the demand of the people for the crucifixion of Jesus by no means satisfied the craving malice of the hearts of his persecutors. It was customary with the Romans—in some instances, at least—to affix on the cross on which the victim hung, his name, and the offence for which he suffered. Pilate, still exasperated with the Jews—though he had yielded to their cry—for having extorted and wrung from his reluctant conscience the condemnation of an innocent and righteous man, gladly availed himself of the opportunity to stigmatize and throw scorn on the whole nation, by publicly recording in their own, and the two best known languages of the world, the fact that on that cross of shame was hung their king. The chief priests read what they deemed the opprobrious scroll, and indignantly demanded an alteration. To this demand the Roman governor roughly replied, as if to close all further remonstrance, “What I have written, I have written:” that is, “I have written it purposely, avowedly, designedly; and it shall stand. I am in no mood to alter at your beck and call. Take what pride ye can in your King, for there he hangs, and all the world shall know it.” It was no doubt a mortifying fact to the pride of the

Jewish aristocracy ; and yet how wonderfully was all this overruled of God for the fulfilment of His own stupendous purpose ! The very demand of the Jewish priests rendered the inscription more notorious : its version into Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, made its meaning accessible to all, and Pilate's abrupt and angry refusal has left, unblotted out, for a whole world to wonder at and adore—a truth which even now the Jews are slow of heart to believe.

Infidelity, indeed, has amused itself in remarking on certain trivial differences in this inscription as recorded by the different evangelists. I need not take up your time in dwelling on so unimportant a matter—it has been already sufficiently answered by Bishop Watson in his unanswerable answer to Thomas Paine ; but I would just remark, as connected with our present subject, what infidelity has not thought fit to notice, and that is, that whatever may be the other merely verbal differences, they all four record in the same identical words the same title, “The King of the Jews.” It was this which Pilate wrote to mortify the Jews, and which he refused to alter at their bidding : it was the title by which five hundred years before the prophet had designated Jesus, “Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Thy King cometh unto thee.” It was the title which God in His counsels had determined beforehand should belong to Jesus, and which Pilate therefore was the un-

conscious instrument in the hands of God to indelibly affix there. In that sense, therefore, what he had written, God had written, and neither Jew nor Gentile, man nor devil, should blot it out. It is true He hath written on His vesture and His thigh another name and a higher title, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." But that is for a later period of dominion and vengeance, when "He shall be clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and out of His mouth shall go a sharp sword, that with it He may smite the nations, and rule the nations with a rod of iron, and tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." And yet one cannot doubt that this inscription on the cross of Jesus, though Pilate meant it, and the Jews read it as an insult, was in reality meant to intimate that there was still mercy for the Jew, still redemption and deliverance for Israel. God, even in that hour of guilt, had not cast off His people; and though they see it not, though they own Him not, Jesus is still their King, is even now waiting to be gracious, and ready, as the prophet foretold, to bring salvation to the daughter of Zion and Jerusalem. "Rejoice then greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, for thy King cometh unto thee having salvation," and "thy redemption draweth nigh."

SECTION CV.

(Chapter xix. verse 25—27.)

Matt. xxvii. 31—56. Mark xv. 20—41. Luke xxiii. 26—49.

WE have read before in St. Luke's Gospel of Jesus speaking words of peace and comfort to a widowed mother, on the carrying forth of an only son to his early grave. It is expressly said "He had compassion on her," and yet, humanly speaking, He had no further interest in the scene that met His view, than the natural feelings of His heart at the sight of a mother's grief in such an hour of sorrow. And that compassion led to a stupendous exhibition of His divine power in restoring life to him that was dead. We have here, in this evangelist, a somewhat similar scene recorded; at least here is a mother—a widowed mother too—weeping, not indeed over her dead son carried forth to his burying, but standing by that son's cross of shame, and witnessing every agony that convulsed his frame, and unable, nay forbidden to minister to the dying anguish of her child. There is no Jesus, as in the former instance, wending His way to Nain on purpose to speak comfort to the mourner, and ready to restore her son; for it is Jesus Himself that hangs there, and His own mother that stands by His cross. As we have been going through these Gospels, we have accompanied Jesus into many a scene of sorrow, the abode of

sickness, and the chamber of death ; and we have seen Him shedding tears, yes, human tears, tears as a man, over the grave of him he loved. And now we are witnessing the Saviour's own dying hours. In one sense we might almost say, in the words of those that reviled Him, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save:" nay, for this hour came He into the world, and it was His Father's will that He should drink of that cup of death and bitterness to its last drop, and therefore had He said, "I am content to do thy will, O My God." And, in that hour, I do not believe that death abated one pang, or torture withdrew one suffering: I believe the blessed Jesus in that hour wrung out the cup to its very dregs; and that as in all our afflictions He is Himself afflicted, so in that hour of death all the natural affections of a human heart were permitted to have their full development. There is something exquisitely touching in the scene here exhibited to us: amid so much to harrow and agonize every feeling, it breaks in upon us like a ray of light in the midst of an Egyptian darkness, and presents to us that sweetest and most affecting of all pictures, a dying child speaking peace to, and providing for the well-being of his widowed and surviving mother. It is indeed no new scene of sorrow, that a mother has to weep over a loved one of her womb gone before herself: many a mother too has wept over a child prematurely consigned to a death of shame

or perpetual exile ; many a mother has had reason to cry out in the anguish of a broken heart, " Oh ! my son, my son ; would God I had died for thee, my son ! " but no mother ever had so sharp a sword pierce through her heart, as she that stood by the cross of Jesus.

We have heard nothing of Joseph since the day he returned to Nazareth from the passover at Jerusalem, when Jesus was twelve years old, and he had possibly been long dead : whether he had left any children I know not, but at any rate we may infer that not one was living at the time, to be the natural and appropriate protector of their widowed mother. No husband—no child, save one, and that one dying the death of a malefactor ! I would remark too what a testimony to human friendship does Jesus here give ! The family at Bethany were not the Saviour's only friends, the only ones He loved : John is especially honoured by the title of " the disciple whom Jesus loved. " Oh ! what titles of human framing, what distinctions of earthly rank can compare for one moment with the appellation of one whom Jesus loved. " Lord ! he whom Thou lovest is sick ; " " Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples whom Jesus loved ; " " Leaning upon her beloved : " Oh, happy name ! oh, blessed distinction ! oh, honourable posture ! John indeed had but a few hours before been one of those who were slumbering amid his Master's agony in the garden ;

he had been one of those "all who forsook Him and fled." And yet there is no reproach, no questioning "Lovest thou Me?" no appeal to his pity and his feelings, no misgiving even for a moment; but in the simplest and the fewest words, and in the fullest confidence of love, He bids His mother behold her son in His friend, and that friend accept and fulfil the legacy He thus bequeathed to his tenderness and care, "Behold thy mother!" Nor was His confidence misplaced, or His intentions disappointed; "From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." It was the centurion's almost own words over again, "I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he doeth it." Jesus in effect said to John, "Do this in remembrance of me," and he did it, from that hour till death dissolved the tie. Jesus has bequeathed no mother as His dying legacy to our love; but He said, as His last command to us, "Do this in remembrance of Me:" and the disciple whom Jesus loved will rise up and condemn many; for he did, and they do not. There is no doubt too a lesson to be learned, a sweet lesson for loving children. How has Jesus sanctified the love that is in a child's heart for a holy mother! How has he marked in its tenderest aspect the sweetest privilege of a child's lot, of repaying in that mother's declining life, the anxieties and love of early years! It is not every mother that needs from her child a home, or provision for earthly want: but, oh! the blessed pri-

vilege, the holy joy of giving gladness to her aged heart, and bidding her grey hairs descend in peace to the grave !

SECTION CVI.

(Chapter xix. verse 28—30.)

Matt. xxvii. 31—56. Mark xv. 20—41. Luke xxiii. 26—49.

THERE are seven precious words which our Lord uttered on the cross, from the prayer which He breathed for the forgiveness of those who hung Him there, to this, the last but one, which is recorded in the verses I have just read, "It is finished." Jesus, but a very short time before, and in reference to this very death of shame, His being reckoned among the transgressors, had said, "All things concerning Me have an end;" and now, on that cross on which He hung between the two transgressors, though Himself without sin, He exclaimed, "It is finished." And most assuredly never yet was such a word of glorious truth and perfect accomplishment, or one so abundant in meaning, uttered by living man, or could indeed be uttered by any of the sons of men. In the original it is but one word,* but eternity will never exhaust its meaning, nor the endless songs of saints and angels wear away its blessedness. The foundation stone was laid, when the angelic choir sang "Glory to God in the Highest" at the birth

* τετέλεσται.

of the babe of Bethlehem ; and now the top stone is brought forth amid the shoutings of the same host, when they heard that triumphant declaration from the dying Jesus, "It is finished." But what was finished? All the types that referred to Jesus? No doubt they were. All the prophecies that told of Jesus' suffering? No doubt they were, even to the very last outrage: and I would say, if I might so speak, that Jesus here seems, in this hour of the dismissal of His Spirit, to have gone over as it were all that the prophets had foretold concerning Him; and recalling what the psalmist had said, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink," He exclaims, "I thirst," and when He had received the vinegar, He adds, "It is finished." Yes! all the prophecies were now accomplished that related to the sufferings and death of Jesus: heaven and earth might pass away, but not one jot or tittle of what God, by the mouth of all His holy prophets, had declared, till all was fulfilled. But was this all? Were types and prophecies alone fulfilled? Was nothing else contained in that mighty word? Yes! all God's counsel was fulfilled: God in His infinite wisdom as well as mercy had decreed to save man by the offering of His own Son, to satisfy His offended justice, and make full atonement for man's sin, and open a free and living way of access to the throne of grace, and pardon for guilty man, by the blood of Jesus; and Jesus had covenanted to take His part in the

redemption, by taking all the suffering, all the penalty on Himself. He saw what none else could see; He knew what none else could ever know—the justice of a holy God, and the anger of an infinite God: He saw the very bottom of that cup of God's wrath, which, if He had not drained, man must have drunk to all eternity; and when He cried "It is finished," there was not one drop of bitterness left in it. His Father's counsel and purpose were completed, justice satisfied, mercy rejoicing in its work, a ransom found, help laid on one that was mighty to save: and as for Himself Jesus might well say, "It is finished." He had said it ere He had begun to drink of the cup of suffering, "I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do;" and now that He had quaffed it to its dregs, He could indeed say of man's salvation, "It is finished:" and the Father from out of heaven could set to His seal that the word was true, and say, "It is enough; let the redeemed go free, let the captive be unloosed, the debtor be discharged, and the prison doors thrown open." I would add too—what the words however so evidently imply—that when a work is finished, it is in reality completed and perfected: it is not always so with man's work; that often wants additions—sometimes from unstable foundations it needs a buttress to support it; and it may be that closer examination and experience find something deficient, and other workmen are called in to supply

the omissions of the first. But is this so with the work of Jesus? Is His work imperfect? Are the foundations insecure, needing the aid and props of others? Oh no! "He is the Rock, His work is perfect." He alone treadeth the wine-press; He alone hath gotten Him the victory; He gave Himself, and Himself alone. As He admitted none to share His sufferings, so He admitteth none to share His glory or our thanksgivings. His mother indeed stood by His cross a sufferer too—an agonized sufferer—but her sufferings, bitter as they were, were no part of our justification, nor paid one farthing of the debt we owed. In that hour of her distress Jesus pleaded for her, Jesus wrought for her; she was powerless then to save, and she is powerless now. And yet how does man in his folly, in his pride, in his self-conceit, think to add to Christ's finished work, not only by the intercessions of others, but by his own work, his own penances, his own righteousness, as if, as one said, "we must needs add our penny to make up Christ's sum." It is a blessed truth too, that if Jesus finished His work *for* us, He will also finish it *in* us: He that hath begun a good work will carry it on unto the end. It is His own glorious title, that as He is the Author, so is He the Finisher: His work of redemption indeed is finished, but His work of sanctification is still going on. But remember that as Christ in His dying hour could say "It is finished"—"I have

finished the work Thou gavest me to do"—so each one of us, at the close, must be able to say of our work, the great work and business of life, "It is finished." It will be no comfort, no privilege, no blessedness to us to say that Christ's work was finished, unless we can say of our own that it is finished also; and with holy Paul, at the time of his departure, declare, "I have fought a good fight—I have finished my course—I have kept the faith."

SECTION CVII.

(Chapter xix. verse 31—37.)

Matt. xxvii. 31—56. Mark xv. 20—41. Luke xxiii. 26—49.

ONE would think that few could have looked upon the protracted agonies of such a death as crucifixion, without an earnest desire to release the sufferer from his torture. There have indeed been fiends in the human shape who have watched every throe and convulsion of departing life in the victims of their revenge; but the casual spectators of such a scene are generally moved to commiseration and pity; and our own annals of martyrdom testify to many a human device to shorten the agonies of the sufferer. It was not so in the present instance. We know from the other gospels, though John does not record it, how the chief priests and elders uttered their cruel jests and sneers beneath the

very cross on which Jesus hung,—how they gazed upon his outstretched form nailed to that cross, and insultingly bade Him come down. It does not appear that any indignation or resentment was excited against the two malefactors that hung by the side of Jesus: if no pity was felt, no scorn at least was expressed, all the venom of their nature was discharged against the one holy and innocent sufferer. And yet now an earnest desire is expressed that their deaths might be hastened: was it that at length some touch of pity, some impulse of humanity had reached their hearts? that, as they witnessed the quivering agonies of the outstretched frame, remorse at length had wrung from them the desire to terminate their sufferings? Alas! it was not so: no such feeling influenced these Jews—no motive of humanity, no impulse of pity stirred within them. They could still gloat on the dying agonies of Jesus, still curl the sneering lip as they passed by, still quote holy texts, not to soothe nor solace His departing spirit, but if possible “that they might vex Him whom they had wounded.” But while thus venting their spleen and malice, the thought suddenly occurs to them that their Sabbath was nigh at hand, and that Sabbath the First, or the Passover Sabbath, and therefore of peculiar solemnity, and that their law forbade the body of a criminal to remain on the “tree” over the day of execution: they therefore hasten to the governor with a request that instant

measures might be taken for the speedier death of those who were then hanging on the cross ;—and what was the method proposed? What was the humane device suggested by these priests and ministers of religion, and servants of the most high God, for carrying out their purpose? We may well say that even “the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,” for it was that the legs of the unhappy sufferers might be broken ; that in that violent and agonizing wrench life might, as it were, be forced to a more speedy end ; and Pilate, it would seem, without a scruple, without a moment’s thought about cruelty or humanity, permitted them to do as they pleased. And now let us look at the result. Was it accomplished? Certainly not. And why not? Because God had declared centuries and centuries before, that “not a bone of Him should be broken.” The Jews sought to do it—they asked leave to do it, and Pilate issued orders that it should be done, and forthwith the appointed executioners proceed to their cruel work. Never, if we may so speak, was there a prophecy so nearly falsified as this. They had already broken the legs of the first and of the second, and they had come to the blessed Jesus to break His—and now, at the very moment, at the very crisis, the hand is stayed, and they brake not His legs. As in times past, when Abraham had already bound his son, and laid him on the altar, and had stretched out his hand and

taken the knife to slay his son, the voice of the Almighty arrested the uplifted weapon: so here, in the very moment, God stayed their hands, and God's word was true, for "not a bone of Him was broken." He was already dead—but did that stay their hand? Did that prevent the mangling of His tortured frame in their savage cruelty? Did that hinder the unseemly exhibition of a reckless useless outrage on a dead body? Far from it. Their hand was rendered powerless to break a bone, because the Almighty from out of heaven bade it be so; but it was no compunction, no tenderness, no reverence on the part of the brutal soldiery, as one of them immediately shewed by thrusting in very wantonness his spear into the Saviour's side. You may ask, why was this permitted? Why did not the same power that prevented the one outrage prevent the other also? For the very same reason—the same sure word of prophecy that declared that "not a bone of Him should be broken," had declared also, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." And both were accomplished; and yet how nearly, might we say, was this, too, unfulfilled. The Jews sought no orders nor permission for this work, and Pilate neither gave nor issued any; and yet as in the first instance, the soldier does not what he is ordered to do, so in the second he does what he is not ordered to do; and all this, that the word of God might be fulfilled, and the death of Jesus,

the actual dissolution and separation of soul and body, be put beyond the possibility of cavil. It is no superfluous asseveration of his own veracity to which the evangelist here gives utterance; it is a solemn appeal to Him by whose Spirit he wrote, "*He knoweth that he saith true;*" and I would add, that it is an undesigned and therefore valuable testimony, that the disciple whom Jesus loved tarried by his dying Master's side till the last pang was over.

SECTION CVIII.

(Chapter xix. verse 38 to the end.)

Matt. xxvii. 57—61. Mark xv. 42—47. Luke xxiii. 50—51.

SURELY never were two men engaged in a more honourable office than Joseph and Nicodemus here; and yet it is singular that of all the disciples, the followers and the friends of Jesus, these should be the selected ones for this work of love. Of Joseph we have never heard before through the whole ministry of our Lord on earth: it is indeed here said that he was a disciple of Jesus, but so timid, so concealed and secret a one, that he is never once named till we hear of him at the burial of Jesus. Of Nicodemus we do, indeed, hear twice; but even as regards him the circum-

stances are hardly to his credit. He came, indeed, to Jesus to inquire into the truth and purport of His mission; and to that inquiry we owe one of the most important conversations, and the sublimest truths our Lord ever delivered on earth; but the visit was a secret one, under cover of the night, that he might not be known and lose caste and distinction among his brethren. Whatever might be the effect of that conversation on the mind of Nicodemus, the seed was assuredly of slow growth: it did, indeed, once evidence something like life, when amid his brother Pharisees he ventured to withstand their cavils and censures of Jesus by asking whether their law condemned any man without investigation or inquiry; and yet even this effort and show of kindness was at once crushed by a fierce reply and charge of discipleship against him. And yet these are the two, and the only two, who in this hour of emergency and danger, when all had forsaken Him and fled, came forward to offer to His corpse the honoured rites of burial. I do not find that during the trial of Jesus, either in the palace of the high priest, or in the Sanhedrim, though members of it, and by their rank, and station, and wealth, men of influence and authority, that they were even present to defend the cause of the upright: we read of no protest, no indignant denunciation of their unrighteous and cruel deed—nothing beyond the cold and all but negative

assertion that one at least—Joseph—had not consented unto their deed. Their faith, courage, and their love were alike weak; and yet no sooner was Jesus dead, than their faith so scanty sprung up in a moment into a goodly growth, that courage, so questionable, burst forth into instant daring, and that love, which as far as we know had hardly vouchsafed a look of recognition during life, now gushed forth into the most affectionate and reverential tenderness for His bruised and bleeding corpse. We may indeed say, a glorious beginning of that noble harvest which Jesus foretold, “And I, if I be lifted up, shall draw all men unto Me.” The first and the foremost to flock in were indeed those as timid and as feeble as doves, and yet how truly does this incident realize that precious declaration of our Lord’s, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” Joseph and Nicodemus came indeed at length and at last, but because they came, their labour of love was accepted, and they were the honoured instruments of fulfilling the Lord’s own word, that “He should be with the rich in His death.”

There is a good deal said in the Bible about being ashamed and afraid to confess Christ before men; and in that sad catalogue of those who are to have their part in the lake that burneth with fire, the “fearful,” or those who “shrink through fear,” stand at the head. And I cannot but read in this narrative, though it records such love, such

courage under circumstances of peril and reproach, a very useful warning to ourselves how we suffer that fear of man, which bringeth so sad a snare, to draw away our souls from that bold avowal and uncompromising declaration of our faith in Christ under all circumstances and in all emergencies. Joseph and Nicodemus undoubtedly have their names recorded in God's book on earth for this their act of love, and I doubt not also that their names are written in the Lamb's book of life as well; yet beyond this one deed nothing is recorded, nothing indeed is known, no other deed of love, no labour, no self-denial—we know nothing. Whether they joined the band of disciples, who had all things in common, we know not; whether they went forth with the rest to preach Christ and Him crucified, we know not; and whether at the last they received the crown of martyrdom for professing the faith of Him they loved, is alike unknown. One act of love, one evidence of courage, one witnessing of a good confession we know of; and He who gathereth up the crumbs that nothing should be lost, has graciously recorded that, to assure us that not even a cup of cold water given in His name shall be unnoticed or forgotten.

It is not, however, in every case that cowardice is thrown off, or shame of a good cause diminished; the fear of man becomes more powerful the more it is yielded to, and he who denies timidly at first

that he belongs to Christ, may proceed to deny with oaths and imprecations at the last; and our Lord infers not merely the possibility, but the certainty, that a shame of Him and of His words will be continued to the end, when He so solemnly pronounces their righteous retribution in the last day, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with His holy angels." "Fear God and fear nought," is a good and a safe motto for a Christian warrior.

SECTION CIX.

(Chapter xx. verse 1—10.)

Matt. xxviii. 1—8. Mark xvi. 1—8. Luke xxiv. 1—12.

THE last time we heard of Peter was at the moment of his sad fall, when he had denied his beloved Master; and on catching the look of his forsaken but forgiving Lord, had gone out and wept bitterly. We now find him once more associated with his former companions, and with the one especially whom Jesus loved. Peter's sin, therefore, though so grievous a one, had been but for a moment; and in that solitary communion with his own heart, amid the tears of genuine repentance, he had no doubt heard in his own soul those gracious words of peace with which Jesus

had so often dismissed the sorrowing penitent, "Thy sins be forgiven thee;" and all his former love, and zeal, and energy had returned; and his first recorded act is to hasten to the grave of his crucified Lord. There is something especially grateful to one's feelings in finding the beloved disciple so cordially and affectionately receiving his erring brother in the spirit of meekness and love—an evidence that Peter's penitence was indeed sincere, and John's loving spirit in full and undiminished exercise. John had himself felt in his own person that however willing the spirit, the flesh was still weak; and he, too, in a moment of weakness, had forsaken his Master in His hour of need; and he knew, therefore, what a tried and tempted spirit was.

We may learn a valuable lesson from this incident for our own guidance: not to turn away in an unkind or ungenerous spirit from an erring brother or sister, seeing that we ourselves are not only liable to error, but are so often drawn away and enticed into sin ourselves. It would have been sad to have seen John thrusting Peter aside and saying to him, "Stand back, for I am holier than thou:" and yet John assuredly had never denied his Master, while Peter had. The sad and harrowing scene, however, from which John had so recently returned, the prayer which he had heard the dying Jesus Himself utter for His murderers, the solemn and affecting charge he had himself

received to be a son to His widowed mother, and probably the recollection of the rebuke he had formerly received for an exhibition of an unforgiving spirit, all combined to predispose John to the practice of that Christian grace and temper, which Paul afterwards so sweetly embodied in his apostolic precept, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." We want a great deal more of this loving and forgiving spirit; when an erring one has unhappily overstepped the pale, and fallen into sin, there are too many unwilling to hold out a hand to pull the outcast back, lest that hand receive pollution by the touch, and so the outcast remains an outcast still. "Ye, which are spiritual"—it is a call to those who have themselves received of the Spirit of grace, who have themselves groaned beneath the burden of sin, and have known the blessings of pardon, and have in their own soul felt that the Lord is long-suffering and forgiving. "Ye which are spiritual" restore an erring brother, or a fallen sister, "in a spirit of meekness;" not reviling, not reproaching, not speaking harshly, but in a spirit of love reclaiming, in "a spirit of meekness restoring." The world is very bitter and unrelenting to those who violate its code, but this is the Gospel-call to its own followers; and here, too, we have a pattern of a loving spirit, of one ready to take a faulty

brother by the hand, in him whom Jesus loved, and not only taking him by the hand, but again united with him as a fellow-labourer in their master's work. And accordingly we here find Peter and John hastening with all the speed of renewed love to the sepulchre, to investigate the rumour which Mary Magdalene had brought that their Lord's body had been removed. It is stated that even Peter and John were not as yet fully acquainted with the Scripture doctrine of Christ's resurrection: they had heard it indeed from His own lips, but it would appear to have made but slight impression either on their feelings or their memories; nor had they that knowledge of Scripture which so abundantly testified to the doctrine, as Peter afterwards so triumphantly proved in arguing with the Jews on this very fact; and yet one can hardly doubt that some glimpses of the truth must have darted in upon their minds, even as they first gazed on that open and vacant sepulchre; and more especially when on entering its silent chamber they saw such irresistible evidence, that the very grave clothes had been cast aside by the dis-imprisoned body, and left behind as monuments of the victory over death, the only trophy the grave was permitted to retain. Indeed, we are expressly told that John at least "believed" when he saw; and though it is not added what he believed, it is, I think, beyond a doubt, that at that moment a belief of the glad truth entered into his heart.

“ He believed ”—it could not mean that the tomb was empty : there was no belief required for that ; he saw it with his eyes : it could not mean that the body of Jesus had been stolen, for again, his own eyes could testify that no hurried plunderer had intruded there. His belief, therefore, must have pointed to the truth that his Master’s word was verified ; that on the third day He should rise again : and had he known the scriptures more fully, he would have been no longer a timid, wavering, hesitating man, but an assured and a confirmed believer, rejoicing in the truth, which had set him free from every fear. It is the same with Christ’s disciples still—if they are not leaning fully and unreservedly on Scripture truths, and Bible promises, they are walking feebly and despondingly : it is a knowledge of the truth alone that makes the disciple free as well as happy.

SECTION CX.

(Chapter xx. verse 11—18.)

Matt. xxviii. 9—10. Mark xvi. 9—14. Luke xxiv. 38—48.

THERE is something inexpressibly touching in this first recorded interview of the risen Jesus. What an honour is here put on Mary of Magdala ! What an honour on her sex, that of all who had loved, and followed, and companied with Jesus, Mary Magdalene was the chosen one to whom the

first appearance of her risen Lord is vouchsafed ! Humanly speaking, one would have thought that He, who with such tenderness had commended His widowed mother to the care of His beloved disciple, would have gladdened that mother's heart by the earliest tidings that He whom she mourned was again restored to her. But it was not so—Jesus henceforth had no human tie. Mary, the mother of our Lord, is to be held in everlasting remembrance as the honoured instrument of God's purpose, and our Lord's humanity ; but as if to shew that the mother of Jesus had now fulfilled her mission, and henceforth was to be remembered only as one whom the Lord had signally honoured as a chosen vessel unto Him, from that hour upon the cross when Jesus committed her to the care of His beloved disciple, and that disciple took her unto his own home, no further mention of her name is made in the Gospels ; and once only, and that most cursorily, is she mentioned in the after history. No message is sent to her, no interview is recorded to have taken place between Jesus and His mother, however probable it may have been : a studied silence is observed, as if on purpose to discountenance that idolatrous reverence in which it was foreseen her name would be held, and, with prophetic intimation to declare in His own emphatic words, that henceforth whosoever should do the will of His Father in heaven, the same should be unto Him and in His estimation, brother and

sister, and mother. As I have alluded to the name of the mother of Jesus being once more,* and only once, mentioned, I would just add one word to remark, that in this mention of her name in the Acts of the Apostles, so far from any superiority or precedency being assigned to her in the narrative itself, it is just the contrary, for her name is mentioned at the close, and the wives of the other apostles are mentioned before her. I can well believe that in that room deference and reverential regard were paid to her by the rest. Her relationship to their own beloved Lord, the sorrows which had pierced through her own heart, and the bequeathing her to the immediate care of John—which of course implied and secured the kindness of all—no doubt won for her a peculiar interest and regard; but no superiority is accorded, none is claimed. “Mary, the mother of Jesus,” lays claim to no higher interest in the court of heaven than the rest: she offers not, nor is she solicited to intercede in behalf of the rest, or of the infant church; but alike united in purpose they all with one accord join in prayer together.

But to return. Why was Mary Magdalene the chosen one on this occasion? I think the history tells us, and, as it tells, reads a valuable lesson. Mary Magdalene was both a seeking and a waiting

one; even before the morning dawned, when it was yet dark, she had come to the sepulchre to seek her crucified Lord; and in the intensity of her affection, as she watched the first streaks of daybreak rising over the hills round about Jerusalem, and her heart in the grave of Jesus, she might have truly said, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they which watch for the morning." How truly and literally was the promise realized to this weeping watcher and waiter, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Mary had gone forth from her home that morning empty handed indeed, with tears in her eyes, and sorrow in her heart; like a sister of old, she might have said, "I will rise now and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways will I seek him whom my soul loveth;" but not like her to add, "I sought him, but I found him not;" for lo! in the abundance of His love, Jesus Himself takes, as it were, the answer from His angel's lips, and with His own mouth speaks peace and rejoicing to her soul. There is exquisite beauty in the whole of this interview between the risen Saviour and His sorrowing one. Like those two disciples to whom Jesus joined Himself on their road to Emmäus, Mary's eyes too, were no doubt for a moment holden that she should not know Him, nor even recognize His voice, but in

reply to His inquiry why she wept—so full is she of her theme, so intent her heart on its one sole object, the finding of her Lord, that without the slightest preliminary circumstance, without even the mention of the name of Jesus, but taking it for granted that all must know her sorrow, she abruptly says, “Sir, if you have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away”—no mention of Jesus, but “Him”—“Him whom my soul loveth;” so natural the burst of sorrow in that woman’s heart.

We may, perhaps, imagine, but we cannot describe the feelings with which Mary must have heard the well remembered tone of love repeating her own name, “calling her by her name”—“Mary”—and how she flung herself at His feet, and would have clung there for ever, and said with Peter on the mount, “Lord, it is good for me to be here,” but that cannot be; there is work to be done—and oh! on what a wondrous errand, with what a marvellous message is she sent! The first-fruits of the Saviour’s redeeming love, the glad tidings which the risen Jesus brings from the vanquished grave, the precious annunciation of God reconciled, and man restored to His Father’s love! And how beautifully, too, is blended the Saviour’s interests with His brethren, how united in the closest ties of kindred and affection—“*My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God!*”

SECTION CXI.

(Chapter xx. verse 19—23.)

THIS first interview of Jesus with His assembled disciples, is expressly declared to have taken place on the evening of the same day on which He rose from the dead, and which, from this circumstance, and from that period, became known as the Lord's day; and to this day was transferred the observance of the Sabbath or weekly rest, originally appointed to be kept on the day on which the Almighty had ended His work of creation. But we must bear in mind that this alteration was no cancelling, no superseding, no setting aside the original institution of the Sabbath: it was simply transferring the observance of it from the last to the first day of the week. It is quite true we do not read here, nor in the other Gospels, the direct appointment of Jesus, as authoritatively as in the promulgation on Sinai, for the keeping of the seventh, "The first day is (henceforth) the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." I at once admit there are no such words as these, and I admit also, that we do not find any *verbal* sanction of the change, but I think we do find what is as satisfactory and as valid. We find that on the first Christian Sabbath held on the altered day, Jesus Himself was present, and that day was the one

on which He arose from the dead : that on the second also He was again with them, and His last parting promise was "Lo ! I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." Though, therefore, we have not the sanction of His direct command, we have at least that of His approval and His presence ; and I think, also, that few would dare to dispute the fact that they who altered the day, the disciples of Jesus, and who were in close and intimate communication with their Master, and to whom He was at the time more clearly explaining and manifesting the work He was giving them to do, I think, I say, that these must have known the mind of their Lord in this, as in every matter, better than we can do ; far better than those who arrogantly presume to set it aside, or superciliously treat those as superstitious who look upon it with holy reverence, and welcome it as the Lord's gracious mitigation of that sentence in Eden, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." We have then, I think, full authority to declare that the Sabbath, originally instituted in commemoration of God's ceasing from His work of creation, is henceforth transferred to the day of our Lord's resurrection ; and this blessed day is now to us a memorial, not only of the goodness and power of God in calling this glorious world into being, and storing it abundantly with all things necessary for the use of man, but it is in addition the memorial of our Redeemer's resur-

rection from the grave, the type and pledge of our own, and the assurance that His work of atonement was accepted, His triumph over death and the grave undoubted, and His spoliation of Satan's power most complete. If the Sabbath was dear to those in patriarchal times as commemorating the wonders of creation; if it were prized by the true Israelite as, in addition, shadowing forth to them their deliverance from Egyptian tyranny and bondage, surely it should be trebly dear to the Christian, representing and recalling to mind the thousand-fold greater deliverance from a far more cruel thralldom than that of Egypt, and a far more exacting tyrant than Pharaoh—even the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan.

There is a power here granted to the apostles on which you may reasonably wish me to say a few words, though no doubt a more practical and congenial theme might be found for a domestic circle than the power of absolution inherent in the priesthood. You are aware that such a power is claimed by the Roman Catholic church; and I see indications that many even in our Protestant church would wish to claim it also; but I would say—and I think every right-minded priest would say for himself—God forbid that such a power should ever be entrusted to any frail and fallible being with human feelings, human passions, human tempers, and human prejudices—nay, I would not that it should be vested in the purest and holiest

of human beings, unless he had the direct and especial guidance and revelation of God's Holy Spirit in every individual case. But I see no such power granted in these words of Jesus ; I see no ground for any such claim either to Protestant or Popish priest. If the successor of St. Peter claims it by virtue of the supposed gift to that apostle alone, here at least the grant is thrown open ; the monopoly, if I may so speak, abolished, and all the apostles have an equal share in all the privileges and powers which the words confer. But did the apostles ever claim or exercise such a power ? Did they ever of their own inherent right remit or retain sins ? Did John himself, when he wrote, " If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins ?" Did Peter in the case of Simon Magus, when he referred that guilty man to God alone for forgiveness, " Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Even in that instance in which it may be urged that Peter appears to have exercised such a power when Ananias fell down dead before him, there are no words of judicial sentence from the apostle's lips, no intimation even, that, till the event occurred, he knew what God's will in the matter was. I never read once the language of authority, far less of assumption, " Thy sins be forgiven thee ;"

or as our Lord here said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." They were commissioned to declare the terms of acceptance with God, they were to make known the way of salvation, and to urge every man everywhere to repent; and on man's compliance with those terms, they might well bid them go in peace; or on man's rejection of those terms, they might as assuredly add that they had no part nor lot in the matter, and were still in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.

SECTION CXII.

(Chapter xx. verse 24 to the end.)

THE rebuke which our Lord gave to Thomas for his unbelief is a sufficient evidence that there was sin in his conduct. At first sight, indeed, it would seem to have been little more than what all the disciples had been in some degree alike guilty of: an unwillingness to admit the fact of the resurrection, and to look upon the statements which had reached them as "idle tales." Perhaps the first sin was in Thomas's absence from the meeting of his brother disciples on the evening of the first Lord's day. No account is given why he was absent, and whether he was wilfully, and therefore sinfully absenting himself, or that it was

unintentional or unavoidable, we are at least justified in saying that his absence on that occasion not only deprived him of a great blessing, but led him into much sin, and brought down upon him a severe and merited rebuke. I think, however, we may go further back than this absence for the beginning of the sin, and say that there was in the mind of this disciple, not only somewhat of a reluctancy against those humbling Gospel doctrines of self-denial and a daily cross, but a hasty and haughty rejection of truths which clashed with his own preconceived opinion, and an arrogant reliance on his own judgment and limited understanding. And if I was correct in the supposition that Thomas's remark on the death of Lazarus, instead of expressing affectionate zeal and a ready promptitude to share his Master's danger, was rather a remonstrance against that Master's purpose, I think we may see the germ of Thomas's unbelief even then beginning to shoot. At any rate, this disciple had not the loving, waiting, humble, patient spirit of her of Magdala, and therefore missed that gracious manifestation of his Lord which was vouchsafed to her and to the rest. This portion of Scripture, however, reads to us a very salutary lesson on many points; and I would especially refer to that to which I have already alluded: the loss we unconsciously sustain in absenting ourselves from the ordinances of public worship. Had Thomas been present on that evening, he, too, would have been gladdened

with a sight of his risen Lord; his faith would not have staggered through unbelief, nor would he have so rudely demanded those proofs of identity, without which he declared he would not be satisfied. There may be times, and frames, too, in which we may feel disinclined to unite with our brethren in worship—something that suggests to us that we would rather stay at home and slight the public service—and yet had we gone, Jesus might have vouchsafed His gracious presence as signally and effectually, though not as visibly, as on this evening in Jerusalem. It has no doubt too often happened that many a one has gone to the house of God in a sorrowing and desponding frame; perplexed, like Asaph, with many fears, darkened with many difficulties, and in doubt whether they have any interest in Jesus; perhaps, it may be, with their affections still lingering around some new-made grave, and as sorrow-stricken at heart as these timid disciples were; and then, as suddenly as here, the closed doors of the heart have opened before some life-giving word, the bars and bolts of human affections that shut out the Saviour have burst asunder, as the chains fell off from Peter's hands at the angel's touch, and Jesus has entered, and His salutation has been, "Peace be unto you," "Why weepest thou?" "Thy sins be forgiven thee," "Go and sin no more;" and, as on the stormy sea of Galilee, there has been an instant calm. "I remember," says Mr. Harington Evans,

speaking of his own chapel, "I remember such an instance once. A poor wanderer that sat down upon those gallery stairs—she had been meditating self-destruction, and was going to Blackfriars Bridge to put her design into execution; she saw the light of this chapel, and she came in. I was speaking of a poor outcast, and the Lord the Spirit made her feel *she* was the poor outcast: her heart melted, her spirit gave way, the stone seemed to be exchanged for flesh, and she remained to pray, though she came to destroy."

Whatever might be the spirit in which Thomas uttered his avowal of unbelief, it is little probable that he ever expected his words to be recorded against him, or the very expressions he had so recklessly used to be repeated to his confusion. He might well have taken up the Psalmist's acknowledgment, "Lo! there is not a word in my tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether." I do not know what his feelings might be at the moment when Jesus once more stood in the midst of them, with that salutation of love on His lips, "Peace be unto you;" but I can well understand the mingled astonishment, awe, and remorse which must have overpowered him when Jesus singled him out from the rest, and in his own words offered him the very testimony he had so scornfully demanded; and how with ingenuous shame, forgetting in the instant every doubt, and rejecting the very test he claimed, he broke forth at once

into that noble confession of faith, "My Lord and my God." It was of course to the risen Jesus, and of Him, that these words were spoken; but though uttered by Thomas alone, one cannot doubt that every heart in the room responded to the truth, and uttered a glad Amen, that he who stood among them was indeed both God and Lord. Thomas, it may be said, was rebuked—he was, but not for his avowal, not for the words he had uttered, but for his tardiness of belief, because he had rejected the report of others, and demanded the testimony of his own eyesight, the witness of his own senses. We, indeed, believe on the testimony of Thomas and the rest: the proof which he desired, and which was vouchsafed to him, is not given to us, but we have a more precious promise in our Lord's assurance that "Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed;" and happy indeed for us if we can set our seal to an apostle's assertion, who, though he had seen, could yet say of others, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

SECTION CXIII.

(Chapter xxi. verse 1—14).

It had been declared by the angels in the sepulchre of Jesus, in their message to the disciples, "Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee;" and here we find the disciples making no long tarrying in Jerusalem, but returning into Galilee, not only to their homes, but to their usual occupations. We may presume of the seven here mentioned, that they were all fishermen; Peter and the two sons of Zebedee we know were, and it is probable the others also. There is something very instructive in this incident, even in its simple fact. Galilee at least had many a loving follower of the crucified One: of those devout women who had followed Jesus to the cross, it is expressly said that some of them were from Galilee. These and others had no doubt since returned to their own homes; and if the tidings of their risen Lord had reached them before they quitted Jerusalem, as it might have done, or had followed them to their distant homes, still we can well believe with what holy joy and eager expectation they would welcome the return of these disciples to tell them more minutely of the wondrous fact of the resurrection of Jesus, and its subsequent events. Never would missionaries have been more welcome, never

preachers more gladly listened to; and yet we find these apostles doing nothing of the kind—they had been sent into Galilee to await the coming of their Lord, and till commissioned by Him, and sanctioned by His authority, they remained silent, or at least assumed no public ministry, but, as represented here, quietly betook themselves to their usual employment on the sea of Tiberias. I would remark, too, that these men looked for no miraculous supply for their daily wants: it was simply daily labour for daily bread. The workman indeed is worthy of his hire, but they were not as yet engaged in the work, and they seem not to have cast a moment's thought—certainly not a repining thought—on the toil, and in this instance, the apparently fruitless toil, to which their trade had called them. "I go a fishing" is the simple observation of Simon Peter, as if announcing his purpose of resuming his usual calling. "We also go with thee," is the reply of the rest, expressive of their readiness to join him: no remark, as if the necessity were a hardship, or as if their Master had done them a wrong in leaving them to their own industry and toil; and it is in this occupation we find them now engaged on this Sea of Tiberias. A night of toil, of fruitless toil, had passed, and morning had now dawned upon them weary and desponding, and most probably speeding homewards. The sun's rays were lighting up the hills around, and perhaps

sparkling on the very waves they traversed : they might have remembered, and perhaps spoken of a similar night of fruitless toil on the same waters, and how disappointment had been miraculously converted into an abundant supply. They might have recalled to mind how often that Sea of Galilee had witnessed the miraculous powers of Jesus, how often He had wandered upon its shores, sailed over its waters, or sate in a boat by the water's edge and taught the people on the shore. And now, it may be, talking of Jesus, and certainly with their hearts full of love for Him, as they drew nigh to shore, Jesus appears : at the moment, indeed, in the distance, and the indistinctness of the dawning light, they neither recognized His features nor His voice ; and yet how instinctively, how naturally, does love detect the presence of its beloved object ! how appropriate in the mouth of that disciple whom Jesus loved, the first exclamation, "It is the Lord." The miraculous draught of fishes might have, and had perhaps, brought the same conviction to all, but love is the first to give it utterance ; and how often is it the case in our Master's service, that, while some are hesitating, some are timid, some uncertain and wavering, love overleaps every barrier, and finds an instructive and unerring response in its own heart. "It is the Lord." And yet though John was the first to speak, Peter with his impetuous zeal was the foremost to hasten to his

Lord, and clad as he was in his under garments, and with his fisher's coat about him, plunges into the waves, and is soon at his Master's feet. What a mighty stride had Peter made in love and knowledge since the period he had first witnessed the similar miracle! It was then awe, terror, and a desire to hide himself from the all-seeing eye of Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," was the broken cry of his terror-stricken spirit, not knowing indeed what he said. Now, how different—how eager to hasten to Jesus! and yet he had indeed lately sinned a grievous sin, and might have most truly said, "I am a sinful man, O Lord;" but no, he knew even now, he no doubt had heard in his inmost soul his Saviour's voice saying it to him, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." Much had been forgiven him, and therefore he loved much.

Jesus had often before sate with them at meat: He had sate at the social meal, at the Paschal feast, and at the sacramental supper—He had sate with them not far from where they were now sitting, when He had before, as now, supplied the food; and He now again bids them partake of the provision He had prepared. It was no doubt to this scene especially that Peter referred, when he speaks of himself and his brother apostles, as the witnesses chosen of God to avouch His resurrection having eaten and drank with Him after He rose from the

dead. It is—to my mind at least—a most touching instance of the Lord's condescension, that now, as the risen Saviour, and in that glorified but still human body, He is still ready to take an interest in the wants of His people, still makes provision for their needs, and still deigns to share with them in all. It was an humble meal, and humbly served, and humble, too, were the guests, but the Lord was the entertainer; it was all of the Lord's providing—the coals, the fire, the bread, the meat, and, above all, the blessing—Jesus sate with them and among them, and as they sate at meat together, well might these disciples have taken up the words of their own Scriptures, and said, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love (and such love) is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

SECTION CXIV.

(Chapter xxi. verse 15—19).

ONE of the earliest appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, on the very day He arose, had been to Peter, and to Peter alone. What passed at that interview between the erring, but penitent disciple and the forgiving Saviour is nowhere related—not an intimation of a single expression

or act is given ; and where the Holy Spirit has thought fit to observe a total silence, it were profanation in man to pry into. The outpourings of a broken and a contrite heart are too sacred for any but the eye of God to witness, or the ear of God to hear. We are, however, perfectly justified in assuming that on that occasion Peter had received the gracious assurance of entire forgiveness ; and we accordingly find him here mingling with his brother disciples on the same footing as before. I do not know whether he was present at those two interviews which Jesus had with His assembled disciples on the evening of His resurrection, and on the same day a week afterwards. His name is not mentioned, nor indeed is that of any of the rest ; but Thomas we know was absent from the first, and so might Peter have been : at any rate, no formal, or if we may so speak, no official restoration of Peter to his apostleship—from which he, too, like Judas, had by transgression fallen—had taken place till this meeting on the shores of the sea of Galilee. Peter no doubt knew that his sin had been forgiven, that it had been blotted out in the blood of that Master whom he had denied ; and no doubt, too, the tears of the forgiven penitent had flowed as copiously, though not so bitterly, as when he first saw his sin in all its atrocity, and rushed from the high priest's hall in the agony of remorse and self-reproach. From the first moment of his

earliest interview with his risen Lord, he could have no doubt but that he was restored to the love and affection of his Master; and his very conduct on this occasion betokened the impatience with which he was eager to throw himself at that Master's feet: but he might well doubt whether he was worthy to be again admitted into that band of devoted followers who were henceforth to go and preach the Gospel to every creature. It is true, that like himself, they had all forsaken Jesus, but none but he had denied Him; and one can well believe how Peter no longer thought of comparing his love and fidelity with theirs, but was far more ready, with one afterwards, to acknowledge that of all sinners he was chief. But was Paul indeed the chief of sinners? and was Peter equally the same? Oh, yes! and every sinner who knows aught of the plague of his own heart, feels and acknowledges the same: never for a moment stops to, or thinks of comparing his sin with another's, but looking only to the magnitude and enormity of his own in the sight of God, is ready to exclaim, "Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." One sees very plainly in this dialogue between Jesus and His disciples, that Peter's was now altogether an abased spirit: no protestations of superior love, or zeal that was ready to undergo all things to prove its sincerity; and yet there was that appeal to an all-seeing, all-searching, and all-knowing

God, who despises not the day of small things. It was a searching question, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" more than these thy boats, and nets, and implements of trade? Oh, surely not that—it was poor love that could not surrender them. "We have forsaken all," had been Peter's boast before: in his unhumiliated state he had been ready to forsake all; even then when he knew nothing, comparatively, of the unsearchable riches of Christ, when he had never experienced what redeeming love could do, or how much a Saviour's love could forgive, even then he was ready and content to forsake all and follow Christ. But, "Lovest thou Me more than these," thy companions and associates, over whom you once boasted your superior love, and of whom you said, "Though all should deny Thee, yet will not I." Peter arose from his fall no doubt a sadder man, and a wiser one also. To his own Master he stands or falls, and simply appeals to that Master for the existence of his love. I can well believe that though Peter's heart was full of love, even to overflowing, though it was gushing out in these almost broken ejaculations, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee;" yet at that moment he would have shrunk in horror from claiming any pre-eminence over the rest, and been content to sit down in the lowest place in his Saviour's estimation, and to have been a door keeper even in the future service of his Master rather than be

shut out from testifying the love that was in his heart. It was the same feeling in Paul's heart, and though he could testify of himself that he laboured more abundantly than they all, yet his own appreciation of himself was that he was the least of the apostles, not merely as one born out of due time, but as not meet to be called an apostle, because at one time he persecuted and denied the church of God. And it is the same in every regenerate heart—not merely "in honour preferring one another," but owning and feeling that the grace and long-suffering of God have been more conspicuously and signally manifested in their own case than in that of any other sinner on earth; and the reason is evident enough—it is no mock humility: such an one has been brought to feel the "desperate wickedness and deceitfulness" of his own heart; and whatever may be the outward conduct of another, which is all that he can read, he feels too painfully that the germ of every sin is in his own heart, and but for the restraining grace of God, would have brought forth its deadly crop, and that therefore his fittest place is to lie low in the dust before God and man with his hand upon his mouth.

"Lovest thou Me?" It is Jesus that asks the question: He asks it of you, and of me; of the youngest child as well as the aged pilgrim. It is not "servest thou?" or "obeyest thou?" or "fear-est thou?" or "honourest thou?" but—"Lovest

thou Me?" I would "bind that question about your neck, and write it on the table of your heart," as the Pharisees did their texts on their broad phylacteries; I would carry it with me where-soever I went; when I sate in the house, when I walked by the way, when I lay down and when I rose up; I would carry it into every scene of daily toil and occupation, or pleasure and amusement, and I would have it rise up continually to ask, in the tender accents of the Saviour's voice, "Lovest thou Me?" and if my heart could faithfully and honestly, and lovingly look up to Jesus and answer, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee, even here and in this work," I would tarry where I was with a safe conscience, and with an unrebuking heart; but if there was the slightest stammer of hesitation in the answer, if there was even the faintest whisper of conscience that love could not and would not linger in such a scene, I would fling down "the wedge of gold, or the Babylonish garment," and at once forsake and forego all that would quench, or interrupt, or sully, or dim my love for Him who "loved me, and gave Himself for me."

SECTION CXV.

(Chapter xxi. verse 20 to the end.)

It has been suggested that this last chapter of St. John's Gospel was not written by that evangelist, but was added by the church of Ephesus, of which he was bishop, either from his own dictation, or from their recollection of his many conversations and narratives. The verses we have just read, fully refute the supposition, as John distinctly asserts that it was he that testified of and wrote these things, and that he knows his statement to be true.

Peter and John seem to have been more peculiarly united in the bonds of friendship than any other two of the disciples. Even his own brother Andrew appears not to have been so intimately associated with Peter as this disciple whom Jesus loved. They were, it is true, partners in their worldly occupation, and this no doubt threw them much together; but there seems to have been something peculiarly winning and attractive in the character and temper of the beloved disciple, and it is here placed in beautiful alliance with that of the still eager, still fervent Peter. Jesus had just intimated to that disciple that his death should be a death of martyrdom, and had significantly added the words, "Follow Me." You remember to

what our Lord no doubt alludes : how before His crucifixion Jesus had said to all His disciples generally on that sorrowful night, "Whither I go ye cannot come;" and Peter in his eager but impatient zeal and curiosity had said, "Whither goest Thou?" and the answer had been, "Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterwards;" and then it was that Peter made that vain-glorious and mistaken boast, "Why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." There were many years of patient and laborious service, of peril and persecution, to be endured before he should be privileged to follow his Master to martyrdom : old age was to come upon him ere his race was ended, or his conflict over; but the hour would come, which he would so rashly have forestalled, when he would indeed follow Jesus through suffering and death to glory; and even with this intimation of final martyrdom, how sweetly must the words "Follow Me" have fallen on the apostle's softened heart : his love was no doubt more fervent than when he first professed his readiness to follow Jesus, for much had been forgiven, and therefore he loved much; but it was a wiser love than heretofore, and no protestation that he was ready to die with Him falls any more from his lips; but discarding all thought of and for himself, and all anxiety for his own predicted fate, he anxiously inquires the future destiny of the friend and

associate he loved. I cannot for an instant imagine that at such a moment of intense and overpowering interest, and with feelings wrought up to the highest pitch of almost holy enthusiasm, any motive but that of deep and abiding affection for the friend he loved, prompted the question, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" It is true the question is rebuked—it was at least an unreasonable one, though dictated by the purest motives; and Peter here received a salutary intimation that henceforth all the energies and best affections of his heart were to be consecrated to his Master's service: like that earlier follower of Jesus who said, "Let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house," and Jesus said unto him, "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

It has been often observed what a striking proof of the fallibility even of the best founded tradition, this passage affords. The tradition was that John, the beloved disciple, and the writer of this Gospel, should not die, but that like Enoch in the patriarchal, and Elijah in the legal, so John in the Christian dispensation should be translated to heaven by some painless passage, without undergoing the common doom of all other men. The tradition had indeed every ground of authenticity that could be needed or desired: it was apostolic, for it was among themselves that it originated and

received currency; it was, too, from no questionable source that they themselves received it, no second or third-hand rumour, which might have added or dropped a word, and so altogether altered its meaning—it was from the lips of Jesus Himself they heard the words; in their own hearing were they spoken, and the very words He used are given; nor can there be, nor has there been the slightest doubt that we have the very phrase on which the tradition was founded, and which received such universal currency as worthy of all belief; and yet we know that it was erroneous, that Jesus had no such meaning in His words, that the tradition was altogether founded on a misunderstood expression of their Lord, misunderstood by the apostles themselves, and yet sanctioned by them as truth.

We have now come, through the loving mercy of God, to the conclusion of these Gospels of our Lord's ministry and abode on earth. "Very pleasant" have been our meditations upon them, and I would hope I may add, profitable also. For myself, indeed, I can truly say, that in endeavouring to bring before you the passages of our blessed Saviour's life, so as to draw out your best affections to Him, every chapter, nay, almost every verse has opened fresh beauties, and revealed new treasures; and that in this Gospel of St. John especially I find evidence beyond question that this same Jesus, of whom he wrote and the prophets spake,

is indeed the ever-living and eternal God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and that He is in very truth He that should come into the world, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Nor can I better or more appropriately close these humble meditations, than in the words of the evangelist himself, expressive of the purpose for which he wrote, and so affectionately indicating the earnest wishes of his heart for the salvation of those into whose hands they should come. With him, therefore, and in his words, and with the utterance of the same earnest hope for your salvation, and a blessing on your souls, would I now say, "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His name."

FINIS.



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